To the veteran soldier of
the 339th Infantry, and
a true friend with
warmest regards.

D. G. Stuart
Maj. Gen. Ret.
Formerly CO 339th Inf

THE 85TH INFANTRY DIVISION IN WORLD WAR II

★

ROME–ARNO

★

NORTH APENNINES

★

PO VALLEY

The 85th Infantry Division

In World War II

By

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TO THOSE CUSTERMEN
WHO NEVER CAME BACK

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To the Members of the 85th Infantry (Custer) Division:

On these pages are compiled a review of the accomplishments of an invincible division in World War II. A written review can never fully provide a true evaluation of our Division's brilliant record. Numerous individuals and units have received recognition of their outstanding achievements, but many whose gruelling, driving, steadfast and grim determination, whose bravery and sacrifice, whose very lives made our success possible, have gone unheralded. These deeds, however, will live on in the minds and hearts of those who performed them and/or will be gratefully remembered by those who witnessed them.

No division received a more intensive and progressive training for combat, and its magnificent achievements in battle attest to the soundness of such preparations. Yours was a long, hard struggle which was brought to a successful conclusion by brilliant offensive operations and which completely defeated the German forces opposing you. The team which carried us to victory included the supporting arms and services which worked for us throughout the campaign. The obstacles overcome by them in augmenting our striking power and in keeping us constantly armed, equipped and fed were almost unbelievable.

Our exultation in the moment of victory was blended with sorrow as we paid tribute to our heroic comrades who fell in battle in order that our victory might be achieved. Our country will forever honor their memory.

I am intensely proud of you and of the honor which was mine in commanding such valiant troops. My full and heartfelt thanks go to each of you for your capable, aggressive, and unstinting loyal service which produced a great victory.

John B. Coulter

JOHN B. COULTER
Major General, U.S. Army
Commanding

THE 85TH INFANTRY DIVISION IN WORLD WAR II

Part I: *The 85th in World War I*

THE NAME CUSTER suggests to most Americans the famous painting, "Custer's Last Stand," which portrays General George Custer standing alone amid some two hundred of his fallen comrades, desperately, fiercely fighting off hordes of howling, feathered Indians. This was at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, and Custer fought stubbornly. Finally, however, vastly outnumbered, he was overwhelmed and slain.

The U.S. 85th Infantry Division was named after this gallant fighting man, George Armstrong Custer, who died in battle at the age of thirty-seven. Although he was born in New Rumley, Ohio, he fought in the Battle of Gettysburg at the head of a Michigan cavalry brigade. He fought under Sheridan in the Wilolemen and Shenandoah campaigns in 1864, and he led a division in the brilliant cavalry action which has been called the Battle of Woodstock. He played a conspicuous part in the decisive battle at Cedar Creek, and, later, won the action at Waynesboro. General George Custer was the man who led the final cavalry charge at Appomattox Court House.

When the Civil War ended, the attention of the United States was turned to the West, where there was trouble with the Indians. General Custer was sent to Kansas, South Dakota, and Montana in expeditions against them. It was on one of these expeditions, in the Territory of Montana, that Custer, along with 264 of his men, was killed at the junction of the Big Horn and Little Big Horn Rivers.

Because of his brilliant service as leader of the Michigan cavalry brigade at Gettysburg, the State of Michigan, through the War Department, named a United States Army camp at Battle Creek after him and called it Camp Custer.

In 1917 the United States had grown up. Fifty years had passed since the death of Custer and the days when he and vigorous and active Americans like him were in the thick of the pioneer westward development of America. Fifty years of work and progress, of economic, industrial, and agricultural development; fifty years of moulding the political, social, and educational life of a new Republic, which gave it a cultural, economic and political greatness, founded on the staunch belief in individual liberty and in the protection of the rights of all its citizens. Independence, initiative, and enthusiastic energy in the accomplishment of challenging tasks were some of the factors that contributed to the progress of the United States.

In 1917 the United States, which had been born in a Revolutionary War and had preserved its unity in a Civil War, now faced the threat of German aggression in a World War. German armies, directed by the professional soldiers of the German General Staff, were marching over Europe; the Allied armies were faltering.

After the declaration of war by the United States on 6 April 1917, the War Department ordered the 85th Infantry Division activated at Camp Custer, Battle Creek, Michigan. Thus the 85th Division became known as the "Custer Division." On 5 August 1917, the 85th Division was established as part of the National Army and promptly began a period of organization and training for action in World War I that was to last until 10 July 1918.

In the early days of its training it was composed almost exclusively of men from Michigan and Wisconsin. Fifty thousand men passed through Camp Custer between January and July of 1918. Thirty thousand of them came and went, many of them passing through the Custer Division. This left the Division with a strength of twenty thousand, raised to this figure by fresh drafts of men from Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky.

After eleven months of training, the 85th received its movement orders early in July 1918. On 11 July 1918, from the ports of embarkation of Boston, New York, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia, the Division began its journey overseas to add its strength to the great struggle. The World War I Custermen arrived in Liverpool, England, on 3 August 1918, where the 339th Infantry was at once detached and alerted for what proved to be service for the remainder of the war as the principal American contingent of the North Russia Expedition, based at Archangel in northwest Russia.

The rest of the 85th was broken up on arrival in France. While the 339th Infantry, plus the 1st Battalion of the 310th Engineers, the 337th Ambulance Company, and the 337th Field Hospital were in England awaiting shipment to Russia, elements of the 85th which had arrived in France went up to the front.

The remainder of the Division was reduced to a training cadre of 250 officers and 4,000 enlisted men. Thus constituted, this portion of the Division was stationed at Casne, France, from 14 August 1918 to 29 October 1918. There it received, trained, and equipped American troops newly arrived from the United States, and sent forward to the front ammunition and supply trains.

Meanwhile, in the battle line on the Western Front, other elements of the Custer Division were in action against the Germans at Marbache, Lorraine, St. Mihiel, and in the Meuse–Argonne. The 150th Field

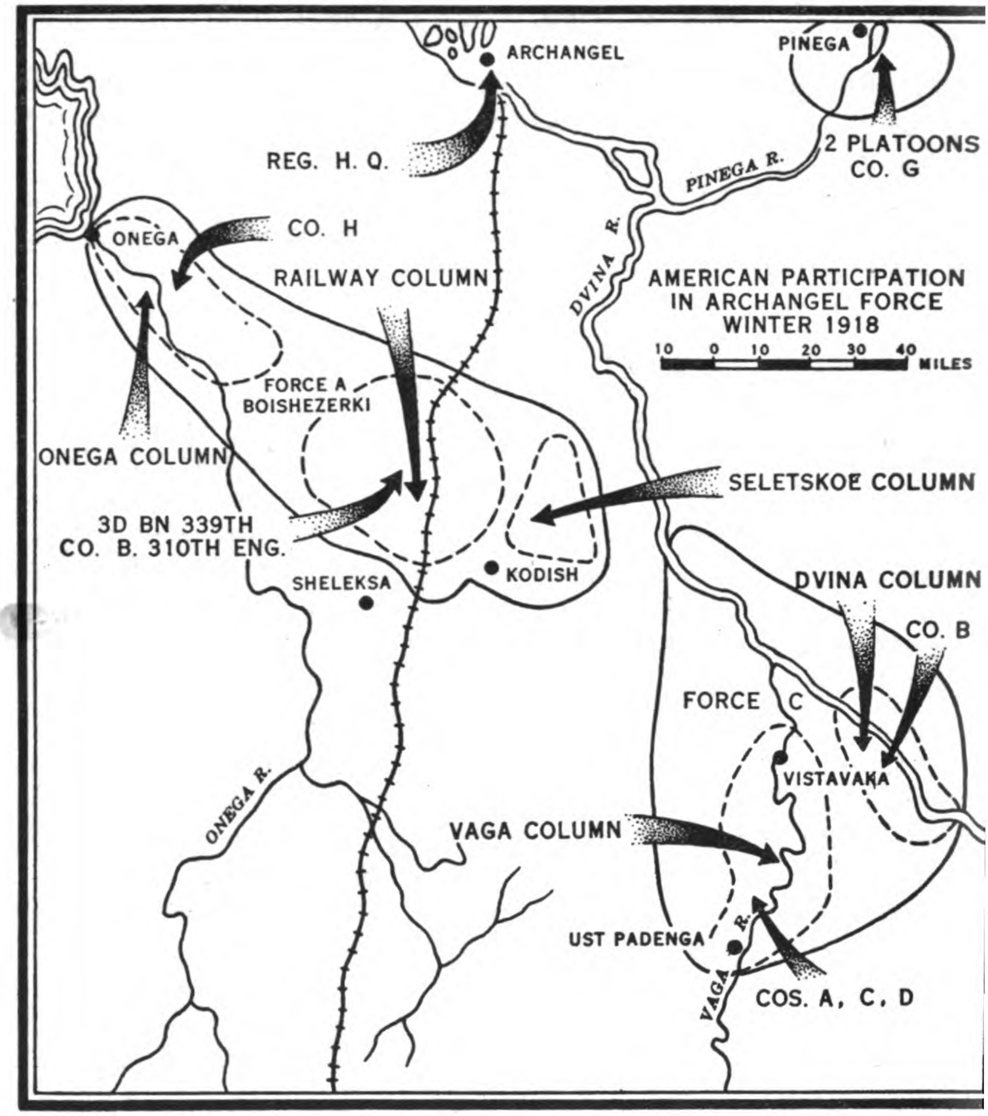
Artillery Regiment and the 310th Ammunition Train were especially active, as was the 2d Battalion, 310th Engineers, and the entire 310th Field Signal Battalion. Artillery units of the 85th Division backed up the infantry in the Marbache sector of Lorraine. The engineer battalion participated in the St. Mihiel operation also, and from 26 September to 11 November 1918 was in action in the Meuse–Argonne Offensive.

The campaign in northwest Russia turned out to be cold and prolonged. The 339th Infantry Regiment had sailed intact from Newcastle, England, and had cast anchor in the Dvina River off Archangel. Here the Custermen of the 339th, later named the "Polar Bear Regiment," joined forces with British and French troops in a cold, stern, bitter fall and winter campaign, alternately waist-deep in snow and mud, often fighting in temperatures forty degrees below zero. Col. George E. Stewart commanded the regiment during this campaign.

The Allied forces in the area, principally British, had been operating against the Bolsheviki for about two months. The 339th, when it arrived, was immediately divided between the two main Allied forces. One of these, along the Archangel railway, was designated as Force A, or the Volodga Force. It was split into three columns, the main body on the railway and the Onega and Seletskoe columns on the flanks. The other moved up the Dvina River and was designated Force C, or the Dvina Force, and was divided into two detachments operating on the Dvina and Vaga Rivers, respectively. Regimental headquarters was established in Archangel, in the Technical Institute, a large old building located near the Olga Barracks, where Headquarters Company was stationed in constant readiness in case of the expected uprising of the uneasy populace.

As a result of battles fought in September and October, the forward positions occupied by the Archangel expedition in November 1918 extended over a front of about 450 miles running southward from Pinega to Ust Padenga, thence northwest to Onega. These posts did not form a continuous line but were a series of occupied positions at vital points, more or less fortified. They were not mutually supporting, and in some cases were far in advance of enemy positions on the flanks.

The eleventh day of November 1918 was just another day on the north Russia front. The battles there were to last well into the spring of 1919. While American troops in France were celebrating Armistice Day and the final overthrow of the Central Powers, the men of the American Expedition in North Russia and their Allies were either actually engaged in fighting the Bolsheviki or striving desperately to erect fortifications to stave off expected attacks. The only news from



Map 1

home during the long succeeding months were reports of the triumphar arrival at American ports of the victorious armies of General Pershin and the demobilization of the millions of the war army. There wa little applause and less interest for the meager handful of doughboy at the Arctic Circle, their backs to the wall, their transport frozen fa in the harbor of Archangel and their line of withdrawal extending pre cariously through a not too friendly area.

Shortly after New Year's Day of 1919, a 339th Infantry force of hundred men, made up of two platoons of Companies E and K sup ported by two guns from the Machine-Gun Company, fought one o the most brilliant battles of the entire campaign. They were pitte

against more than two thousand enemy soldiers in a fight to hold the town of Kodish. The Polar Bears dug in in the ice and snow. The suffering from cold, hunger and fatigue was intense. Trench mortars clogged repeatedly with ice. Yet, in spite of these hardships, the 339th men held off the Bolsheviki for seven bitter days until relieved by a force of British infantry.

In another engagement, on 19 January 1919, after the Bolsheviki had launched a furious offensive against the Allied positions in the vicinity of Ust Padenga between the Archangel railway and the Dvina River, a platoon of Company A attempted to execute a withdrawal to the main company position. Floundering waist-deep in snow across a plain eight hundred yards wide and destitute of all cover, forty men of the original forty-seven fell dead or wounded.

The greatest engagement of the north Russia campaign, the Battle of Boishezerki, was fought from 31 March to 2 April 1919. The Bolsheviki had renewed their attack in an effort to drive the Allies from their advanced positions before aid could reach them by water. The enemy had driven a wedge between the Allied positions of the Onega front and those on the railroad front. It appeared that enemy success at this point would result in the capture of Archangel itself and in the possible annihilation of the entire north Russia expedition. For the better part of two days, the Reds hurled themselves against the Polar Bears but their attack was in vain. The Americans held and the Reds were forced to withdraw to Sheleksa.

On 5 June 1919, Company F, 339th, was the last American unit to be withdrawn to Archangel from the north Russia front. The first elements of the regiment arrived in New York on 30 June 1919.

The American North Russia Expeditionary Force lost a total of 8 officers and 217 enlisted men killed in action, died of wounds, or died of disease. Their officers and men received 188 decorations for valor from four governments—American, British, French, and Russian.

Following demobilization after the close of World War I, the 85th Division was constituted as an element of the Organized Reserves on 1 October 1921, with headquarters at Detroit, Michigan.

Part II: *Prelude to Combat*

HILAIRE BELLOC once said that Germans are of necessity histrionic. It is an appetite of theirs. 1 must see themselves on a stage. They must be play-actors to be ha and therefore to be efficient. "If I would be master of Germany,' said, "I should place golden plumes in my helmet; I should orga wide cavalry charges at reviews and move through life generally to crashing of an orchestra." That was in 1902.

Twice since then, Germany has donned the mask and trod bri but dramatically upon the stage of the world. The Kaiser was a gr showman. His successor in the history of German despotism, Ad Hitler, was not an admirer of Belloc, so that it is unlikely he got t idea from Belloc. The latter must have been right, then, in his analy of the Germans. At any rate, Hitler, the latest master of German utilized all the elements of pageantry and drama jestingly suggested l Belloc. In 1933 he began rehearsals and in 1936, with the re-occupatio of the Rhineland, he raised the curtain on Act I of the new pla German armies were again stomping about in a show of force; Germa industry was geared for war; German troops were again ready fo aggression.

In 1939 World War II began, as almost everyone had known fo many months that it would. Poland, France, Luxembourg, Belgium Holland, Norway, Yugoslavia, and Greece fell in the now familiar succession of quick military successes which made the Germans masters of most of Europe. Nor are the aggressions of Fascist Italy to be forgotten. America, of course, looked upon the unsavory trend of events with complete distaste and, in fact, actively though belatedly aided the victims. No sensible American, however, was able to persuade himself that war would not come to the United States. Our sympathies were with the conquered countries and our fears were well founded that the Axis dictators had not and could not satiate their lust for power and conquest. On that Sunday morning in 1941 when we did become involved there was, in addition to the surprise at the manner of our involvement, a reaction of relief and resignation. We had felt for a long time that we were going to have a part in the conflict and our outlook was, "It might as well be now; let's get going."

Men working in the U.S. Intelligence on the West Coast at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor saw the War Department swing into action. They saw the swift, dramatic westward movement of the Army's available trained fighting men and divisions. Literally overnight, troops abandoned camp and were on trains rolling toward defense positions

on the West Coast of the United States and toward ports of embarkation for Hawaii and the mid-Pacific island outposts.

Patrols and outposts were set up on the beaches of the East and West Coasts to repel possible invasions. Men in training in Army camps along or near both coasts were alerted, and rehearsed swift evacuation of camp barracks to troop-dispersal areas and the manning of anti-aircraft gun and AA machine-gun positions in the event of air attack.

Having deployed sufficient men and arms to meet possible invasion and guarantee the security of the continental limits, the War Department set about fighting the war in earnest by issuing general orders for the activation of certain divisions for training and eventual combat.

One of the first divisions ordered activated was the 85th (Custer) Division. The 85th was assigned to Camp Shelby, a vast, sprawling training camp ten miles southeast of the town of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, ninety miles northeast of New Orleans, and some sixty miles from the Gulfport–Biloxi area, playground of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The camp must have been laid out by a New Yorker because the streets and avenues crossed one another at regular intervals and bore the same numerical designations as their counterparts in Manhattan. Three main avenues, or highways, which ran the length of the camp, were crossed by sixty-two streets. The camp was capable of housing three full divisions plus special troops. Spurs running onto the grounds from main rail lines facilitated delivery of clothing, food and other supplies to the post quartermaster warehouses.

It was hardly a place, however, that pampered men fresh out of civilian life. Most of the buildings were post exchanges, division and regimental headquarters buildings, supply buildings, and an occasional theater. Living accommodations, generally, were tents, for officers and enlisted men alike. The only exception was the regimental commander in each area, who lived in a small, wooden, one-story, two-room house.

The War Department carefully chose the key leaders it ordered to organize the Custer Division. Senior officers assigned were: Brig.Gen. Wade H. Haislip, Commanding General; Col. Raymond C. Barton, Assistant Division Commander; and Col. Jay W. MacKelvie, Division Artillery Commander. Most of the Special Staff officers, including the Engineer, Chemical Warfare, Artillery, Signal Corps, Quartermaster Corps, and Inspector General's Department officers, attended special schools for last-minute instruction in the organization and training of a modern American infantry division. The classes were conducted at the Army's Command & General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

When World War II began, General Haislip was Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, on the War Department General Staff in Washington. Before taking command of the 85th, he attended a one-month school for division commanders at the Command & General Staff School. On 9 March 1942 he became a major general and on 5 April 1942 arrived at Camp Shelby.

Colonel Barton, who became a brigadier general on 10 March 1942, was Chief of Staff of IV Corps prior to reporting on 14 April as Assistant Division Commander. He attended an advanced course of instruction in organization and tactics at the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. While there, he addressed the graduating class of OC-7, Fort Benning's seventh officer candidate class of World War II. The majority of these new officers ultimately were assigned to the 85th Division.

General MacKelvie came to the Custer Division from the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff.

April of 1942 was a busy month. General Haislip could see his division growing. By 6 April the General and Special Staffs and the enlisted cadre of Division Headquarters had arrived. On 14 April, the Assistant Division Commander, the Division Artillery Commander, and the remainder of the cadre officers joined the Division. The rest of the enlisted cadre reported on 17 April. The Division's strength on this date was 158 officers and 1,190 enlisted men.

The original officer cadre reported to Camp Shelby from the Command & General Staff School, the Infantry School, the Field Artillery School, the Engineer School, the Quartermaster School, the Medical Field Service School, and the Signal School, and included fifty-seven Regular Army officers and forty-eight National Guard officers.

Between 21 and 25 April the remainder of the officer complement arrived. These included Reserve officers from the Infantry School who had just completed a three-month refresher course in tactics, weapons, and administration, and recently graduated officers from Officer Candidate Classes 6 and 7. The officers of Class 7 had been assigned to camps all over the United States, but a sudden reversal of orders by the War Department recalled most of them from their new posts and sent them to Camp Shelby to organize and train the 85th. By the end of April the Division had 581 officers and 1,270 enlisted men.

Although training and conferences and schools were already in progress for these early arrivals, the 85th was not officially activated until 1201 hours, 15 May 1942.

That was a memorable day. No one could then foretell the tremendous deeds that would be performed by the men of this Division. Few knew that it was to be one of the most highly trained divisions in

the Army of the United States. This was the Division, born on this day, its muscles and members and rich blood made up of sturdy, determined Americans from all over the Union, that was to break line after line of vicious German defense in Italy and evoke high praise for its accomplishments from the Chief of Staff, from high officials, from military leaders of many nations.

In the late morning of 15 May 1942, just before the Division was activated, General Haislip presented to the units the regimental colors of World War I. Said General Haislip: "This is a moment of great solemnity. After twenty-three years, the 85th Division is today re-activated in the midst of the most serious war this country has ever known. In presenting these colors to you I charge you to hold them high; and when we have won this war and you return these colors to the custody of our Government, I charge you to return them as they are today—clean and shining."

The officers and enlisted men who organized and conducted the initial training of the Custer Division were competent, selected men. Its generals and regimental commanders were among the finest the Army had. Its Reserve and National Guard officers were able and intelligent. The enlisted men of the cadre for the most part were Regular Army noncommissioned officers with many years of service and plenty of the know-how that is necessary to get a division started. A large number of them came from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and most of them had served all over the country and some in the Philippines and other foreign posts. But an army or a division without the mass of ordinary privates and privates first class is a handle without a suitcase, a light switch without the light bulb, the driving mechanism of an automobile without the engine.

At 1430 that afternoon the "engine" came roaring into Camp Shelby. The first trainees, green as the first grass of spring, fresh from a hundred different civilian occupations in fifteen states, had arrived. It was a warm, bright, sunny day and the early comers to Shelby had already begun to feel like oldtimers. But to the new arrivals, all was brand-new. Pvt. Herbert R. Power, a school teacher from Weir, Mississippi, was the first to step off the train and into the warmly extended right hand of General Haislip. The war was on!

By 31 May 1942 the regular arrivals of troop trains at Camp Shelby had brought the Division strength to 634 officers and 13,062 enlisted men.

As the Custermen began training, far across the waters of two oceans stop-gap forces were beginning to slow the full swollen tide of Axis

aggression in Europe and the Pacific. Japanese ambitions which embraced not only the Philippines and the eastern Asiatic mainland, but China, Burma, India, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, New Guinea, New Britain, and thousands of smaller islands together with domination of Australia, had been progressing unbelievably. But with the Japanese poised to strike against Australia, Gen. Douglas MacArthur had arrived Down Under on 17 March 1942, and had taken the offensive at Port Moresby on New Guinea. Vice Adm. William F. Halsey had already taken the offensive in January with a raid on the Gilbert and Marshall Islands; and now on 7-8 May 1942, in the Coral Sea, bordered by the coasts of New Caledonia, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, an American task force under Vice Adm. Frank J. Fletcher had put a definite check to Japanese expansion.

In Europe, Hitler too had been stopped. After conquering France, he had been unable to beat Britain into submission and had turned to the East. Against Russia, the Nazis continued to be successful, but only at growing cost and against constantly stiffening Red Army resistance. Marshal Von Bock's and Marshal Von Kluge's armies of fifty-one divisions had been unable to take Leningrad and had been cut down in vain assaults against the deep defenses of Moscow. In June 1942 the defense of Sevastopol was in its seventh month—seven months during which the Red armies had stemmed the advance of the whole German and Rumanian Crimean Army toward the Caucasus.

The life of the infantry inductee at Camp Shelby was an arduous one. Enforced encampments of thousands of men always afford discomforts and sacrifice of certain liberties in the interest of the smooth functioning and welfare of the entire community. This was not civilian life, and each man found himself putting out more physical effort than he had ever engaged in before. Early housing at Shelby provided little in the way of comfort. Enlisted men lived in pyramidal tents—four-walled affairs with roofs shaped like pyramids. Officers lived in two-man wall tents. The tents had little or no electricity so that spending a quiet evening at home turned out to be sitting around a service club or standing around an impossibly crowded post exchange bar drinking beer or soft drinks and playing the pinball machines.

Shortly after the early arrivals reached Shelby, however, carpenters and equipment arrived and the Division moved down to another part of the camp near 36th Street while construction was under way in the old area. Hutments were going up. No more tents! No one, of course, had any idea what a "hutment" was. But soon it became apparent that they were made of wood. That sounded better than canvas. They were

made in two sizes—square ones for officers and rectangular, larger ones for enlisted men. Things were decidedly more comfortable. Each hutment, depending on size, had one or two stoves for heating and every hutment was equipped with screens, sliding windows, and wooden shutters.

Military life began to look a little better than it had. Then, too, passes were being granted; and although it was little less than torture to stand in the interminable lines waiting for the few available buses into Hattiesburg, it was a wonderful change to get off the post and into a town. There, one could visit newly made friends, shop in the stores, sit down and place his order in a restaurant, or just roam around enjoying once again the opportunity to be in a civilian atmosphere. Of course, time off in a boom town such as Hattiesburg had distinct drawbacks. There were thousands of soldiers everywhere, all crowding the same establishments. Theaters, hotels, and restaurants were jammed. Many a small restaurant owner beat his breast in anguish at the thought of all the business that could have been his if only his place were thirty times as large as it was. There were a few attractive places several miles outside of Hattiesburg where one could enjoy good food and dancing.

Every once in a while a man was fortunate enough to get a pass to Gulfport or New Orleans. Then indeed was the weekend pleasurable, in spite of the distances and the crowded conditions. Many of the little towns along the way to Gulfport on the Gulf Coast were hardly big enough to be called towns, but they will be forever memorable to the men who passed through them or tarried in them, for they offered a touch of home, a little bit of the civilian atmosphere of each man's home town which he had left in order to fight for the protection of all American towns. Such names as McLaurin, Brooklyn, Fruitland Park, Bond, Wiggins, Perry, Wortham, Nugent, and Landon, on the way to Gulfport and Edgewater Park, Mississippi City, Gulfport, Longbeach, Pass Christian, Henderson's Point, Bay St. Louis, and Waveland, on the route from Biloxi to New Orleans; and Purvis, Lumberton, Poplarville, Derby, Picayune, and Slidell, on the Hattiesburg–New Orleans route, will not quickly pass from memory of the men who trained at Shelby.

The erection of more comfortable housing and the granting of passes, however, had no effect on the remorseless individuals who planned the daily training program. If anything, things were getting tougher. Early rising by now was becoming a habit, which is not the same thing as saying it was enjoyable. It seemed a little ludicrous at first to be falling out into the company street in the cool, early morning darkness—just to be counted. There was no reason why someone

couldn't count them in their beds. They came at night at bed-check time and saw that everyone was tucked in. Of course, not everyone was honest about bed check. The CQ, carrying a flashlight, started at the end of the hutment at bunk No. 1 and it was not uncommon for the occupant of No. 1 to quietly occupy No. 8, opposite him, as soon as he was checked. But if things were not strictly straightforward at bed check, neither were they so at reveille. The early morning darkness was a constant blessing for the men who liked an extra five minutes in bed. It was not easy to see that a man standing in formation in the third rank was wearing only overcoat and overshoes instead of the customary full uniform.

Training didn't begin until 0800 in the morning, but it seemed as though a day's work had already been done by the time the call to fall out for calisthenics came. Calisthenics was an extremely important part of the Army's plan for preparing the infantryman for combat. They loosened up long-unused muscles and toughened them, developed better lung power and general physical endurance. As the Custermen learned later in action, combat life is arduous and tiring, and men need physical stamina as well as moral inspiration. Most of the value of the calisthenics was in the day-by-day half-hour periods of exercise. This training was scientifically planned to develop the muscles in order: first the neck, shoulder and arm muscles; then the chest, back and waist; followed by the leg, ankle and foot muscles. Great was the din raised by the new inductees during the first days of calisthenics as bones cracked and backs ached. Usually in the evening the aches became worse than in the morning, for it was then that muscles began to stiffen.

Civilian life gave no preparation for these periods of physical torment. Sitting in automobiles, street cars, divans, office chairs, soda-fountain stools, theaters, *et al,* plus a complete lack of any positive program of exercise, made the physical side of early Army life very unpleasant for those whose lives involved all of the old civilian inactivity and comfort. However, after a few weeks the muscles stopped crying out against this treatment because they were getting in shape. Life began to have some interest. Instead of lying on the bunk in the evening too stiff to move, men began to walk to the PX and the theater.

Calisthenics, however, was just the first half-hour of the day's training program. Drill, training in weapons, instruction in chemical warfare, guard duty, use of the bayonet, obstacle courses, grenade practice, 6-, 10-, 12-, 16- and 25-miles marches, extended-order drill, map and compass reading, digging of foxholes, camouflage and range firing kept men busy and tired.

The obstacle course was a variation of the calisthenics program and was frequently substituted for it. An area about a hundred yards long and fifty yards wide was used. At the starting point was a three-foot-deep trench in front of which the earth was piled up. The men started from these trenches, about eight or ten men at once along the fifty-yard width, running similar parallel courses. Immediately after climbing out of the ditch and over the mound of earth—no easy task in itself—the runner was confronted with a sort of tunnel made of a series of about six pairs of upright logs, each pair joined across the top by a third log. These pairs were spaced about two feet apart, thus creating a tunnel through which the runner must pass crouching low. Not to bend over low enough meant striking one's back on the crossbars; bending too low meant crawling on hands and knees which slowed up the runner. The general purpose of the tunnel, in addition to squeezing the liver, was to teach the infantryman how to move forward swiftly, at the same time keeping as low or obscure from enemy eyes as possible. Right after straightening up from this ordeal, the runner encountered a similar set of poles and crossbars, but these were higher and the idea was not to run under them but around them. The runner ran to the left around the first one, cut back to his right and went around the right of the second one and so on, threading himself through the series very much like a snake worming its way through the grass.

After getting a little dizzy from this twisting, he had to straighten out swiftly and run the length of a ten-foot tree trunk spanning a ditch. There were other similar deterrents along the way until the puffing runner reached the last two obstacles—an eight-foot-wide ditch with the dirt piled up on the near and far sides and, following that, a series of high crossbars which must be jumped. The runner was supposed to dash up on the near side of the ditch and leap high and wide, landing on the earth on the far side. Most of the men made it all right, but there were always several who failed to get a good start, or who, reaching the crest, faltered long enough to lose the necessary drive that would have carried them over. These men of course landed in the ditch, which was all very well in dry weather, but after the heavy rains for which Mississippi is noted, it meant wet feet. The main thing wrong with the course, all agreed, was that, having completed it, one had to turn around and run back through the whole thing again to the starting point. Some men, having reached the starting point again by jumping into the three-foot ditch, were so exhausted they practically had to be pulled out before the next runner jumped in on top of them.

As soon as everyone had run the course, all double-timed from the obstacle course two or three hundred yards up to the training area.

There the ten-minute break was perhaps the most welcome one of the day.

The training areas of Shelby were open pieces of ground, sandy and rocky with some grass here and there. There was practically no shade. Only a few training areas were bordered by a small patch of woods. The sun was hot during the summer months. It was a real relief to move into the shaded areas or in some cases crowd into the little shade offered by the only nearby tree for a class in the disassembly and assembly of one of the many infantry weapons.

Most Americans learn quickly, especially about things mechanical. Our insatiable curiosity has given us a confidence that we can find out about and tackle just about anything. Not only the Custermen, but all infantrymen, learned quickly how to take apart and put together the various weapons they would later use in combat. And these weapons were numerous. The pistol, the revolver, the M-1 (Garand) rifle, the M-1903 (Springfield) rifle, the carbine, the Browning automatic rifle, the light and heavy caliber .30 machine guns and caliber .50 machine guns, antitank guns—the infantryman, who was expected to be able to use any or all of these weapons of aggressive ground action, was required to learn how they all worked, what made them fire, what parts of them moved after firing, how the bolts, cams, springs, levers, and gas action worked; how to recognize what was wrong when one of them would not function; how to rectify the stoppage in daylight or darkness; and how to clean, oil, and preserve all of these weapons.

This required considerable concentration and study. For the non-commissioned officers and officers (recent civilians all) who taught these subjects, it meant hours of evening study of the Army's field manuals.

Many things in life are habit. The Army applied this principle to training. Often it became boring and sometimes seemingly useless to continue again and again to disassemble and assemble weapons. Nevertheless it was this constant practice over many months which made the Custermen so smoothly proficient in the care and use of their weapons. On one occasion in Italy after the 85th had become a veteran combat division, it was out of the line, back in a training area, when Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce, on her first tour of the Armed Forces in Italy, observed a group of twelve men sitting around a shelter-half taking apart a BAR.

"I thought this instruction was given in basic training," she remarked.

Young, aggressive Col. John T. English, then regimental commander of the 339th Infantry, explained that this type of training was continual; that to neglect it was to get out of practice and become slow and clumsy

in the handling of weapons. A highly trained division is alert and ready to use its weapons swiftly at all times.

Knowing the names and functioning of all the parts of these weapons, however, was only part of the training necessary for their efficient use. Long hours were spent sitting, lying and kneeling on the hot rocky ground learning the proper way to hold the rifle in the positions most suitable for effective fire. It took considerable practice to learn how to breathe properly just before firing and how to squeeze the trigger properly. Many hours were spent developing the proper sight picture, which the soldier was expected to find in the sights of his rifle when he lined them up on a target.

Bayonet training, one of the many arduous arts the infantryman had to master, always seemed to fall on very hot days. The burning sun on unshaded fields could be withering, as men armed with M-1 rifles to which were fastened long, hard, steel bayonets, lunged vigorously at imaginary targets.

The previous life of the recent inductee had been devoted to quiet, peaceful, often humdrum pursuits such as going to school, playing ball, tinkering with cars in the neighborhood garage, farming, or teaching. It was quite a shock to him, therefore, to suddenly comprehend the final aim of all infantry training: to close with the enemy in combat, defeat him and occupy and hold the ground which he controlled. There was something very personal about the possibility of meeting a representative of the other side on some distant battlefield in the near future that created a greater interest in and attention to bayonet training than developed in many other subjects. The men of the 339th Infantry, at least, were constantly impressed with the offensive spirit of the bayonet, for blazoned on their regimental coat-of-arms, in Russian, is the motto: "The Bayonet Decides."

The proper use of the bayonet, it was found, was in cold, scientific handling, not in wild slashes. The various thrusts and parries were taught in sequence. Men lined up in two long rows facing one another across twenty yards or so of fighting space. An opponent always made bayonet practice more impressive and effective, whether the opponent was a straw dummy or another soldier. At a command, all men snapped their rifles from the rest position to the on-guard position with the right forearm locked hard against the stock of the weapon, which was pressed hard against the right hip, bayonet point thrust forward and upward at an angle aiming at the opponent's throat.

On guard . . . short thrust . . . withdraw . . . parry . . . butt stroke . . . slash . . . long thrust . . . withdraw . . . jab! Over and over again, step

by step . . . short thrust . . . parry . . . long thrust! It could be monotonous after a while but, like marching, only constant repetition and practice seemed to guarantee efficiency. In the high point of preliminary practice the men donned gas masks, charged across a piece of open ground and plunged into the woods thrusting and parrying with great ferocity at imaginary Germans and Japs.

The real test of the effectiveness of preliminary bayonet training was in running the bayonet course. A series of straw dummies suspended by wires alternated with hinged, straw-stuffed heads mounted on four-foot posts. Long, hinged poles protruded in front of the straw dummies, representing the enemy's bayonet. This had to be parried to the right or left before the attacker's bayonet could be plunged, not too far, but far enough into the dummy to eliminate the target, at the same time allowing quick, easy withdrawal of the bayonet for use against the next opponent.

"Smash" was a short quick ferocious butt stroke to the opponent's chin which, because of the position of the rifle, then was followed by a slash, a sharp downward swing, with the blade of the bayonet calculated to cut across the enemy's neck or shoulder.

"This is not a pleasant business," was the general reflection as men grimly learned to master the technique of driving cold steel into flesh. But, with continued practice came improved skill, and with skill came confidence.

In the summer of 1942, World War II was almost three years old. During that period most of Europe had fallen under Axis domination. Japanese armies had overrun key parts of China, the Philippines, and the smaller Pacific islands. These staggering military accomplishments, at that time unequalled in speed and scope in the history of warfare, were brought about partly, it is true, by modern mechanization coupled with surprise aggression. But in large measure, too, they were carried out successfully because of the employment by the aggressors of skillful, highly trained and physically toughened military units. This was a new war, a modern war, with the chance of victory enhanced by the use of aircraft and tanks. But nearly three years of fighting had demonstrated that the victories were won on the ground by the swift movement of masses of infantry troops, foot soldiers, over difficult terrain on foot. Few military units ever had enough transportation to carry all their soldiers at once and few battle areas provided terrain suitable for motorized movement everywhere. Fighting for infantrymen, therefore, meant much walking. To be able to march long distances, carrying full equipment, men had to be conditioned and toughened.

The German Army had launched its rigorous physical conditioning program shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933. Calisthenics and long marches consumed much of the training time in the Nazi armies. When Hitler breached the defenses of France in 1940 and smashed through at Sedan, he used keenly trained forces toughened and conditioned almost unmercifully for seven years. German foot soldiers swarmed through the thick Ardennes forests and marshlands around Sedan and, almost without rest, pressed on until the breaking of the Maginot Line, effected by their swift ground movement, was complete. With the Maginot Line useless, France was helpless and capitulation was a matter of days. Nazi Germany was morally wrong; she was a ruthless aggressor; but she was tough.

The Japanese armies that seized control of Singapore, Malaya, Manchuria, and the Philippines were made up of seasoned men, trained for many years. They could march long distances under heavy loads, and with little nourishment. If the Germans were trained unmercifully for long marching, the Japanese were conditioned brutally. Stragglers on a 25- to 35-mile forced march were often shot. Officers used clubs and short whips to keep the men going. As an illustration of the cruel, brutal frame of mind into which these people had worked themselves in preparation for war, the story was often told during the war of an incident in peacetime Japan (1937). At the end of a 35-mile forced march which was accompanied by an American military observer, the pace had been gruelling for thirty-four miles and the nerves of all the marchers were taut, when a barking dog ran out toward the head of the column. A Japanese officer slashed at the animal with his sword and severed both front legs at the knee joints. Yelping in pain, the dog ran off, hobbling on its bleeding stumps.

Our War Department recognized early in the war that if we were going to be successful against such foes it was going to be necessary for us to develop fighting men of equal physical toughness. This could be done only by stern, systematic physical conditioning under difficult circumstances. Except where emergency required, we could not afford to throw into battle against these admittedly tough enemies, men who were physically unprepared to match them.

In order to cover ground in the battle area, to pursue a retreating foe, to conduct forced marches to surprise him on his flank, infantrymen had to be able to march. So the War Department scheduled long and frequent marches for infantry units in training.

Marching is not parading. Civilians both in wartime and in peacetime see the soldier only on leave or on parade. They never see him

at work—in training or fighting. They hear the band and see the endless ranks of neat marching men. They see the clean uniform, smartly pressed, the shining shoes, the gleaming rifle, the crisp, jaunty step, the rested sturdy face, freshly shaven, the straight shoulders. They do not see the same men on a long march in a combat or maneuver area, or in the hot countryside surrounding a Southern training camp. They do not see the wrinkled, sweat-stained uniform, the perspiring, bearded face, the dust-covered shoes and rifle, the heavy, tired, monotonous step, the dull eyes that tell the story of exhaustion, the aching shoulders that sag under the weight of a full field pack. Marching was monotonous, terribly so; and tiring. But in time the leg and back muscles became conditioned. The 85th started moderately with six-, ten- and twelve-mile marches. The first twelve-mile march was conducted on a hot July day at Camp Shelby and dozens of the men fell out along the way. Doctors and aid men were busy. Even the ambulances were full of men who could not walk another step and had to ride the last two miles. Most stuck it out for the twelve miles, however. One infantryman had to be ordered by a doctor to fall out before he collapsed. The muscles were still a little weak and the stamina limited.

These same men who fell out during this march, however, later proved that the way to become proficient in marching long distances was to march long distances. They, together with the rest of their comrades, completed a 25-mile march in a little over seven and a half hours. The War Department required twenty-five miles to be covered in eight hours. Many battalions of the Division completed the march without a man falling out. Failing to complete a major march meant doing it all over again in a few days; and no one relished that thought, least of all the officers who completed a 25-mile march one day and were then assigned to lead the stragglers in a 25-mile march the next day.

However, by now it was physical fitness that kept the men in ranks more than fear of repeating the march. And with fitness came more confidence. The trainees were becoming soldiers.

On 24 July 1942 a high-ranking officer quietly arrived at Camp Shelby. He was of medium height and stocky build and his face bore an expression of sternness tempered by kindliness. On his collar was the single star of a brigadier general. He was John B. Coulter, who later became major general and led the 85th Division during the major part of its training days and in all of its victories over stubborn German arms in Italy. General Coulter had been thirty years a Cavalry officer and was a graduate of the Cavalry School, the Army War College, the

Naval War College, and a distinguished graduate of the Command & General Staff School. Before coming to the 85th Division he was commanding general of the 3d Cavalry Brigade. General Coulter arrived in the heat of a Mississippi summer and set about at once aiding General Haislip in the training of the Division.

Military training in the summertime in a Southern camp under pressure of a wartime emergency was extremely tiring and trying. But it was in that summer of 1942 that the 85th laid some of the most important groundwork for its later brilliant battle success. All the men worked hard. There was no let-up in the intensity of the training program. If anything, the pressure was increased. Trainees who had sat out on the ground in the hot sun around shelter halves, picking up, naming, and putting down the various parts of machine guns and rifles, who had spent hours getting in mind the sight picture for these weapons by sighting along wooden aiming bars, who had stretched themselves out prone in the heat on the dusty ground sighting for practice along their rifle barrels or adjusting their rifle slings and "getting the left elbow under the piece," now took their weapons, piled into trucks and headed for the firing ranges. These ranges were outside the residential area of the camp. From early morning until late afternoon, the surrounding countryside echoed and re-echoed to the chatter of rifles, pistols, and machine guns, both light and heavy. Over on the artillery-mortar range, men strung their wire and manned their telephones and OPs (observation posts) located on high ground from which they could command a good view of the terrain ahead and direct fire. Here the 60mm and the 81mm mortar men fired live ammunition at colored panel targets, the culmination of the many days and weeks of dry-run training in how to adjust the mortar, use the sight, and sense the bursts on the terrain.

Here, too, the artillerymen of the 910th, 403d, 328th and 329th Field Artillery Battalions, who, it must be remembered, were integral parts of the 85th Division, obtained their extensive, vital early training under the direction of General MacKelvie. The infantrymen were not generally conscious of the artillery units or of the fact that they, too, were engaged in arduous daily training. This state, however, lasted only during the early training days. It began to be dispelled at the first coordinated problem, in which the artillery fired live ammunition over the heads of the infantrymen, and dissolved entirely when the foot troops surged forward on the battlefield a mere two hundred yards behind the protective pounding of the artillery's screen of steel.

During this first summer, too, all of the infantry division's many

specialized personnel who are so vitally necessary to its success in combat, swung into an intensive period of study, training and practical work. These included radio operators, wiremen, jeep drivers, truck drivers, mechanics, ordnance men, and supply men. As the months went by these men became more and more skillful in their particular lines of work. They worked hard and faithfully during these training days and, because they did so, were later in battle a source of constant amazement to military observers who saw them operate with great speed and efficiency. This perfection was due partly to the men who gave the instruction, partly to the ability and energy of the specialists themselves, and partly to the fact that so many months were spent in training. It can never be forgotten, however, that it was due in great measure also to the early commanders of the 85th Division—its regiments and of its special units. Men like General Haislip, General Coulter, General MacKelvie, Colonel (later General) Stroh, General Gerow, Colonel Schweickert, and Colonel Vevia, insisted upon "unimpeachable workmanship." This exactness and striving for perfection became an unmistakable mark of the 85th Division and was carried out and practiced day after day, in early training, in maneuvers, and in battle.

Exactness in the servicing and maintenance of the Division's motor vehicles was almost as fanatical an objective of General Haislip's as his insistence upon assuming the correct position for firing a rifle lying, kneeling, sitting or standing. When the men of the Division first saw General Haislip in the training areas he appeared to be carrying a small riding crop. Actually, as the vehicle drivers mournfully informed their friends, the riding crop housed a very accurate tire gauge. The general apparently had a fondness for picking out a jeep or truck at random and checking the amount of air pressure in the tires. Regulations required a certain pressure depending upon weather conditions and the type of vehicle. After a brief, one-sided conversation with the general, the unfortunate driver of the vehicle that had either too much or too little air felt that he had been grossly negligent and that a continuation of his individual laxity in such matters would undoubtedly result in our losing the war.

No commander, including General Haislip, was more exacting in his insistence upon perfection than one of the regimental commanders—a man whom all ranks generously cursed in training and on maneuvers and for whose tough training they unanimously thanked God during the heat of battle. He was Col. Paul J. Vevia, commander of the 339th Infantry, who once told his officers that he was ninety-eight per cent military and two per cent human. Colonel Vevia was a short, energetic man of medium build. He wore glasses and somehow always managed

to be chewing on the butt of a well smoked cigar. No one ever remembered seeing him light up a fresh one. Ostensibly, at least, he passionately disliked any of his officers or enlisted men being married and having their wives anywhere near the post. Many of his married officers will forever maintain that Colonel Vevia prolonged his discussions of military tactics at the weekly Friday night schools for regimental officers solely to keep them from their wives in Hattiesburg or other nearby towns. As later events proved, he was far-sighted. Although his methods of instilling discipline and perfection and leadership into his troops were hard to take at the time, they later paid off in lives saved and battles won.

On one occasion during maneuvers Colonel Vevia reduced three noncommissioned officers from corporal and sergeant to private when, passing them on a Louisiana hillside at dusk, he found them smoking. This was hard on the men involved, but it emphasized tremendously to them and to everyone else the importance of not smoking at any time when the enemy might discover your position from the light of a match or the glow of a cigarette.

In September of 1942, the now rapidly toughening 85th was honored on two occasions. One was the attachment on 9 September of nine Latin-American officers to the Division to observe the workings of an infantry division in training. The officers were from seven different countries: Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Uruguay. These officers were in turn attached to the regiments and accompanied the troops to the training areas, where they were greatly impressed with what they saw. They marvelled at the large amounts of ammunition that seemed to be available for firing problems. They were surprised at the degree of military knowledge and the state of efficiency of the 85th after only a few short months of training.

The second event was the review of the 85th Division by the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt. The President was on a "secret" tour of the nation, visiting mainly its large industrial plants. Early one warm morning in late September training was being carried out as usual when instructions came down to begin an immediate police-up and check on the neatness of the entire Division area. That was all anyone but the Division staff had to go on. Something was about to happen. Company areas were checked. The garbage barrels near the messhalls, although empty and clean, were put out of sight. Rakes were produced and the ground was spruced up much in the manner of a small boy having his hair combed before a Sunday afternoon visit of his Aunt Sarah.

Lunchtime came and together with it the opportunity to converse with someone who might have had a chance during the morning to get in the know. The only thing that was apparent was that a review of troops was scheduled for the afternoon. Obviously now some person of importance was coming. The preparations that now began to be visible after lunch were too elaborate for an ordinary review. The entire 31st (Dixie) Division, also stationed at Shelby, plus IV Corps and Third Army troops, began to line both sides of Shelby's Highway 24, with men facing away from the road, five paces apart. Energetic Jim (Powerhouse) Herndon, officer in charge of the 339th Infantry's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, and grandson of William Herndon, the law partner of President Abraham Lincoln, was ordered to place a guard around the 339th Infantry's parade ground. The few persons who knew of this were now convinced that the visitor was at least the Chief of Staff and more likely the Secretary of War.

By 1315 troops had begun marching onto the parade ground. It was evident to all men now that the entire Division was assembling. The 337th Infantry and the 338th Infantry were marching to the area from other parts of the camp. Ordnance and all the artillery troops were with them. There was the usual wait after getting in place. Then General Haislip arrived—wearing leggings! That in itself was significant. The general never wore leggings. He was apparently taking the role of tactical commander of troops, and would stand at the head of his division while someone else reviewed it. The next happening dispelled all doubt. A long, black limousine, with the top down and carrying several plain-clothes men, turned off the highway and churned up a cloud of dust as it headed toward the parade ground. It swept up to the reviewing stand. One man got out and conferred with General Haislip. The rest circled the entire massed Division in the car, obviously checking on security details. They swung back to the reviewing stand, picked up their man and drove off back toward the highway. This could be no one else but the President.

In about ten minutes the troops were called to attention and the limousine reappeared, this time accompanied by two more. General Haislip was standing stiffly at attention at the head of his division. The car carrying the President drove onto the parade ground quickly and came to a halt within a few feet of the general. FDR, wearing his best campaign smile and extending his right hand, called out to General Haislip: "How are yuh? Glad to see you again." General Haislip trotted forward, saluted the Commander in Chief, and conversed with him briefly. Then he joined the Presidential party and accompanied the President as he drove around the regiments and battalions, looking

keenly at the men, their posture, their faces, their general military bearing. He was pleased with the appearance of the Division and so expressed himself to General Haislip before he departed. It was learned later that the 85th was one of the few tactical units reviewed by the President on his entire tour of the country.

On 6 October 1942 the 85th Division had tangible evidence that the United States Army was growing in strength. The Division was partially drained of some of its key members, who were transferred to form a cadre which would organize the 103d Infantry Division. They formed a group of 137 officers and 1,260 enlisted men to put into practice the training and experience gained with the Custer Division.

On 17 October, the first of 3,750 enlisted men, replacements to the 85th, began to arrive at Camp Shelby. Most of the original inductees who had joined the Division back in April and May of 1942 came from the Midwest—from Kansas, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri and other states. These new replacements hailed from the induction centers in the New York, Pennsylvania and New England areas. They arrived at Camp Shelby full of zest and enthusiasm. Whether it was the coolness of the climate in the northeastern part of the country or just their desire to let the rest of the Division know whence come the best American soldiers, is hard to say. These men were brand-new soldiers, recently out of civilian life, so the Division Commander immediately launched them on a special eight-weeks training program so that they could join the rest of the Division.

The 85th Division was now composed of men from almost every state in the Union. There were Southerners from Atlanta, Columbus, and Birmingham; Northeasterners from New York, Boston, Harrisburg, Montpelier, and Portland in Maine; men from Portland in Oregon, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego; men from Chicago and Cleveland and DeKalb and Quincy; from Houston, Shreveport and Jackson; from almost any place one could name.

Not only did they come from all states but they came from every walk of life. They were carpenters, salesmen, brokers, insurance men, chauffeurs, teachers, school principals, bookkeepers, taxi drivers, roustabouts, farmers, engineers, storekeepers, crane operators, factory and retail-store foremen and superintendents, reporters, mill workers, actors, garage men, gas-station attendants, truck drivers, machine workers of all kinds; they were bakers, warehousemen, lumberjacks, construction workers, painters, trappers, *ad infinitum.* In spite of the tremendous diversity of occupations and professions they had two things in common. They all lacked military knowledge and they all had grown up, lived,

and worked in a free country. Most of the men had never fired a weapon, not even a .22 rifle, yet in the short space of a few months they had learned the intricacies of the firing mechanisms of many weapons and had acquired a high degree of skill in handling and accuracy in firing them. Living in the United States, a country fiercely proud of its heritage of freedom won in a revolution against tyranny and oppression, had developed in all, from whatever part of the country they came, an attitude of independence and initiative. When men are left free to follow their inclinations in life, to select the work they want to do, to profit in proportion to the amount of work they perform and the degree of ability they possess; when they are left free to express their opinions and to hear or read the opinions of others without dictatorial political restrictions; when they can come or go as they please and attend the church of their choice; in a word, when freedom is emphasized and constitutionally protected and the dignity of the human person is given precedence over the power of the state, men develop a habit of individuality, initiative, responsibility, and independence. This lays a tremendous foundation for the successful military defense of one's country. For men will fight harder and longer, and more tenaciously as well as more ingeniously, if they are free. They will make better soldiers than the products of the policed state if they are allowed the fullest possible access to information about the causes and the nature of the struggle in which they are called upon to give their time, energies, and often their lives.

General Haislip ordered that the best instructors among the officers and noncommissioned officers be assigned to teach the new inductees. As a result, the training was intense and highly efficient. At the completion of the eight weeks the new troops were well qualified to take their places with the rest of the Division.

The entire Division then entered upon a period of extensive range work which was followed by rifle platoon combat firing tests. The Latin-American officers were particularly interested in these firing problems and religiously followed the troops out to the problem areas to watch their technique and progress. These exercises also marked a great forward step in the progress of the training program. They were the first specific effort to develop aggressive infantry teamwork. Until this time most of the inductees' training had been individual. In learning the names of the parts of a rifle or a machine gun and in learning how to hold and fire the weapons he was acting by himself. Now in platoon firing problems he was learning how to move and fire in cooperation

with others. He had to know where the men about him were and what was the objective to be achieved.

In the meantime, during this period, the War Department was conducting a screening program throughout the country in order to obtain from among the enlisted men of the various divisions candidates for the officer candidate schools. The 85th responded most generously to this demand and by the end of December 1942 had sent 667 men to the Artillery, Ordnance, Engineer and Infantry Schools.

Mississippi produces a bone-penetrating cold in the month of January that makes New England seem like Paradise by comparison. There is no snow there, but the damp cold, especially at three in the morning, pierces the very marrow. Unfortunately for the comfort of the Custermen, the training schedule called for regimental combat team exercises to be held in the month of January 1943. A combat team is similar in composition to a division. In fact it might well be called a third of a division, since there are three regiments. A striking force is built up around each regiment, consisting of the regiment, an artillery battalion and a company of engineers. The combat team is given the number of the regiment around which it is built; for example, the team which involved the 338th Infantry Regiment was known as the 338th Combat Team, or 338th RCT, or was reduced to the more convenient abbreviation of CT 8. CT 7, CT 8 and CT 9 were born in the De Soto National Forest surrounding Camp Shelby in the month of January 1943. In 1944 and 1945 in the mountains of Italy they were powerful, coordinated striking forces that performed magnificently against the enemy. Long and concentrated training was, in very great measure, responsible for this success.

Schools were conducted back at Camp Shelby for infantry and artillery officers down to and including company and battery commanders in order to develop infantry-artillery coordination. Meanwhile, many other schools were active for officers and enlisted men. There were motor schools, supply procedure schools, and radio schools.

In the midst of this feverish preparation for war, the 85th lost its commanding general. General Haislip was transferred from the Division by the War Department and ordered to take command of XV Corps, stationed at Camp Beauregard, Louisiana. General Coulter assumed command of the Custer Division. Col. Lee S. Gerow (who later became a brigadier general) was named Assistant Division Commander. Shortly afterward, on 15 March 1943, from the War Department General Staff in Washington came Col. William T. Fitts, Jr., to become Chief of Staff of the 85th Division. Colonel Gerow left his command

of the 338th Infantry Regiment to go to Division. He was a short, mild-mannered man with sparkling brown eyes. He could sternly enforce his orders but at the same time win the complete respect and affection of officers and enlisted men alike.

Colonel Fitts was tall, clean-cut, dignified of manner and carriage. His modesty was exceeded only by his quiet, dry sense of humor. His shy smile belied his great determination and the wealth of his military knowledge. Colonel Fitts possessed one of the keenest brains among the high command of the 85th Division. From the time he joined the Division until the day of its inactivation after the war, he served as Chief of Staff, except for one important and memorable period in the North Apennines in Italy when he assumed command of the 339th Infantry.

The 85th was now ready for division maneuvers. It had completed the formal part of squad, section, platoon, company, battalion and regimental team training and had developed an effectiveness in the use of combat teams. It was now prepared to operate, for the first time, as a division. This was a big step forward and the period ahead was to be a vital one in the whole training program. The effectiveness of the Division on maneuvers, the lessons learned there, would determine the success of the Division in battle. The new Division Commander, General Coulter, realized this and took pains in addresses to his men to stress the significance of the maneuvers about to be held in Louisiana.

"We are here," he said, addressing the Division before departure, "that I may talk to you as your Division Commander and as a soldier with battle experience in order to acquaint you with conditions that you will meet.

"First of all, I want each member of the 85th to know that I am personally interested in every man, just as your parents and loved ones are. The going has been hard and will continue to be so; but through our training we have become hardened to whatever conditions we may face.

"The maneuvers in Louisiana will provide a dress rehearsal for war. What you do there you will probably do on the battlefield. We are all great creatures of habit. Unless you do as you have been taught you will pay dearly in your own blood and subject your comrades to a like fate. . . .

"Let it always be said that the 85th Division has done its tasks well and is the most efficient fighting division in the Army."

On 21 March 1943, as the Custermen were packing clothing, guns, and equipment for the move to Louisiana, the New Orleans *Times-*

Picayune carried the story of the opening of General Montgomery's offensive against Rommel's Mareth Line, protecting German positions south of Bizerte in Tunisia. Rommel had driven almost to Alexandria, the tide had turned at El Alamein. The outlook for the Axis in the Middle East had been bright. Domination of Syria, Iran, and Iraq had seemed within their grasp. The possibility of immobilizing Turkey and of blocking Lend-Lease supplies to Russia by way of the Persian Gulf had appeared near, with a threat to India from the west not remote. But here again in still another part of the world the tide had turned against the Axis. The Germans had been driven back across hundreds of miles of desert and now with their backs to the wall, were trying to retain a foothold in Africa. For American troops had cleared Morocco and Algeria and now, commanded by General Patton, and joined by General Anderson's British First Army, they were on Rommel's western and northern flanks and were closing in for the kill.

On the Eastern Front the tide of German expansion was still ebbing in the face of the great Russian counteroffensives in the Caucasus and in other vital sectors along the lengthy battle line.

Japanese fortunes had been favored no more than those of their disappointed partners in Europe. The Japs had been stamped out in Guadalcanal and were fighting off Allied attacks on New Georgia and Bougainville in the Northern Solomons.

Throughout the Allied world there was a growing air of confidence, bringing relief to millions of anxious people, much as the mass of dry, cool air that ends a humid heat wave brings zest and energy to nearly prostrate sufferers. The "free" world had been saved, temporarily at least, and there was a great enthusiasm to be up and doing, to get at the tasks that would keep the Allied armies on the road to victory.

It was in this spirit and with this attitude that the men of the 85th Division drew tight the cords of their bulging barracks bags and awaited orders to move to the maneuver area.

On 26 March 1943 the Custer Division was ordered to Louisiana. Several days later all the units of the Division closed in near Caney and Leesville.

Many a civilian has winced upon hearing an ex-service man prelude a conversation with "When I was on maneuvers . . ." But it would be well to extend to him the courtesy of an attentive ear. For he is about to relate an incident that happened in one of the most important phases of his life. His story will probably be full of humor and human interest and will almost certainly recount some difficult or uncomfortable thing he was called upon to do. Many times, as in the case of combat stories, it will be a tale of a narrow escape from death. Civilians

will find that the maneuver veteran's most tender memories are the recollections of the toughest things he had to do. He will tell about lying out all night in the cold and rain; about fording a creek in icy water up to his neck; about carrying a heavy machine-gun tripod or a mortar baseplate for miles on a hot, dusty day during a forced march; about lunching on a dry peanut-butter sandwich and a few mouthfuls of water during an arduous day of simulated battles in the Louisiana woods. There is something about difficult and unpleasant tasks that renders the performance of them distasteful and the recollection of their accomplishment satisfying.

Louisiana maneuvers were difficult and uncomfortable and unpleasant because they were designed to be so. It was planned by the War Department that they would bring about hardship and suffering because actual combat is synonymous with hardship and suffering; and, as General Coulter observed, "maneuvers are a . . . rehearsal for war."

The first thing that impressed the Custermen on their arrival in the maneuver area was the fact that hutments were a thing of the past. There was no place to live except on the ground—not once in a while or for a few days at a time, as on the regimental problems, but all the time, week after week. They were really going to rough it.

Stories told by men previously on maneuvers about the dangers involved in the maneuver period had been heard by the Custermen. Many of them were true; many were exaggerated in detail. In the 1941 maneuvers there had been quite a few bad accidents. Blacked-out trucks, loaded with troops, had failed to negotiate turns in the dark road; vehicles had collided in the dark on the roads; men had been run over and killed while they slept on the ground in fields or by the side of the road. Many lessons had been learned by the high command during that period and the precautionary rules put into effect as a result of the 1941 maneuvers made the later "battles" considerably safer.

One aspect of the 1943 maneuvers that had been the same in 1941 was the presence of snakes, pigs, ticks, and chiggers. Many a man, after settling down on the ground as comfortably as he could the first night in the maneuver area, awoke in the middle of the night to find a pig in his puptent. Pigs and cattle in the South generally are allowed to roam free over wide areas to graze or forage for food. The Louisiana maneuver area happened to be particularly overrun with pigs. They were huge, unsightly animals, with extremely voracious appetites. They were naturally attracted to the Army's kitchens and to the sumps, or garbage holes. The pigs seemed to travel in gangs, and were little less than ferocious in their search for food. After several successful pig raids on unprotected kitchens, the Division Headquarters found it neces-

sary to issue orders for the establishment of a permanent all-night guard around every company and battery kitchen area. The guards had only one special order: to keep the pigs away from the food.

Many a company and battery mess officer and mess sergeant acquired an intense dislike for the animals. These men were chiefly responsible for seeing to it that, when their unit left a particular bivouac area, the grounds in the vicinity of the kitchen were neat and clean. Practically every time a move was made, in the early stages of the maneuvers, a battalion or regimental commander upbraided the mess officer and the mess sergeant, who had had their areas carefully policed, about the unsightly condition of their kitchen. A return to the scene, of course, revealed that the pigs had moved in on the abandoned grounds and had burrowed down deep into the earth over the sump hole and had tossed most of the contents all over the place.

It was not uncommon to be awakened about 0400 by unearthly screams of one of the pigs who had fallen into an open foxhole. At first the Northern boys were at a loss as to how to extricate the animal; but after watching some of the old farmhands in the Division who hailed from Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, or Georgia, they quickly caught on. A strong grasp and pull on the pig's ears and the back of its neck, and it would practically run up the side of the foxhole.

Ticks are little insects, generally about the size of a fly. They have a flat back and are dark brown in color. Anywhere they happened to get on a man's body they would burrow into his skin, seeking to suck out his blood. Once into the skin, they clung tenaciously and it was next to impossible to pull them off just by grabbing and pulling. One fairly good method of removing them, the troops discovered, was to turn them over on their backs and align their bodies perpendicular to the victim's skin and then pull them out quickly with a steady straight pull. Too sudden a pull might leave the head in the flesh and cause inflammation. The most successful remedy, however, was to hold the lighted end of a cigarette near the tick's back. This intense heat momentarily caused the tick to release its grip on the flesh, and a swift follow-up with the thumb and forefinger usually removed it. Most men spent as much as an hour or more each day removing ticks from their bodies.

Just as aggravating were the chiggers. These were very tiny, practically invisible, red insects that got into the body and caused an itch far more intense than any mosquito bite. It was impossible to resist scratching them, and, of course, scratching made them worse. An outsider coming into the bivouac area would think himself in a monkey cage. Dozens of men stood about in the evening scratching themselves vigorously, seeking some little relief.

The first part of the maneuver period was devoted to what the Army calls "flag battles." These were tactical problems in which the Division worked as a unit against an imaginary, or simulated, enemy represented by red flags. These flags were moved about the terrain by umpires who controlled the problems. All troops were to observe strict tactical conditions, practicing all the security requirements that would have to be adhered to on the battlefield. Vehicles had to be driven at night without lights; flashlights could not be used; smoking at night was prohibited; and troops were required to take cover and concealment from the "enemy" during the daytime. Men and vehicles had to be sufficiently dispersed to prevent excessive casualties from machine-gun, mortar, or artillery fire; and, most lamentable of all, foxholes or slit trenches had to be dug and camouflaged just as they would be in battle; emplacements for machine guns, mortars and antitank weapons, as well as artillery pieces, were ordered dug and camouflaged. Perhaps the greatest gripe on maneuvers was against the constant requirement of digging slit trenches every time a unit moved into a new area. It was a laborious, monotonous, backbreaking task, digging holes in the ground everywhere, six feet long, two feet wide, and two feet deep. The Army contended that the only way men could acquire the *habit* of digging a trench every time they came into a new area was to dig one each time according to the specifications which afforded the soldier the maximum amount of protection. Later in combat no one questioned the wisdom of having a hole to jump into during enemy shelling or bombing.

During these first few weeks of flag battles the 85th engaged in every major tactical situation: a meeting engagement, an attack, a defense, and a withdrawal—all against the simulated enemy. Many valuable lessons were learned and the Division acquired a facility in operating for the first time as a division.

The flag problems were a helpful and natural prelude to the employment of the Division as a unit against a live "enemy." The Division moved to Peason, Louisiana, in the maneuver area and there, for several weeks in a series of problems, engaged in "combat" with the 93d Infantry Division and the 100th Infantry Battalion. The latter was composed of Americans of Japanese ancestry who came chiefly from Hawaii. This battalion later went to Italy where it became part of the famous 442d Infantry Regiment, also all Americans of Japanese descent, which established an outstanding record against the Germans in Italy.

The problems were now built around the same tactical situations enumerated above, with the difference that the flags were out and troops were on opposite sides, fighting it out.

This made the maneuvers more interesting, for men could now be

captured and taken off by the "enemy." Blank ammunition was used to liven up the proceedings. The troops walked mile after mile, as usual, but sometimes they were transported in trucks. Supply procedure was followed as it would be in combat; food, clothing, and ammunition were brought up for the forward troops. Guns were cleaned, carried forward, and fired from concealed positions with blank cartridges, at the "enemy" whenever his position was discovered. Many a hot argument developed in which representatives of the opposing sides debated which had arrived first with the most men and consequently had wiped out the other force. These arguments had to be settled by the officers and the noncommissioned officers who had been appointed as umpires. This was an agreeable method of resolving the difficulties. Pride, perhaps, was the only thing hurt.

About the middle of May 1943, the 85th was again honored, this time by an inspection of the Division while engaged in maneuvers. The inspectors were the acting commander of the Army Ground Forces, Lt.Gen. Ben Lear, and members of the AGF staff. General Lear studied all the opposing forces in the maneuver action and stated at the time of his departure: "I was particularly and favorably impressed by the 85th Division. Its discipline, alertness, interest, and appearance as well as the concealment of men and vehicles was noticeably good."

A few days later was 15 May 1943. The 85th Division of World War II had completed a year of training. On this occasion of the first anniversary of activation day, General Coulter expressed his satisfaction at the amount of real hard work that the Division had efficiently accomplished. He called attention to the review which had been held at Camp Shelby by Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, and to the review of the Division by President Roosevelt. "Your work is not unnoticed," he told his men. "Much is expected of the 85th Division. A year ago the time to prepare seemed short. Now it is much, much shorter. The coming months must teach us to hit the enemy and hit him hard . . ."

The maneuvers closed with an instructive problem which involved the crossing of the Sabine River.

The names of the towns will mean little to the casual reader, but there now had been added a new list in addition to the one acquired by the troops while at Shelby. They were (north of Leesville) Hawthorn, Anacoco, Hornbeck, Kurthwood, Peason, Slagle, Alto; and (south of Leesville) DeRidder and Merryville. They will forever suggest to the troops who maneuvered on the terrain about them the laborious effort, the fatigue, the intense application, as well as the discomforts due to unpleasant weather that were so much a part of their lives while they learned the ways of war on Louisiana Maneuvers.

In the meantime, while the 85th was receiving, in maneuvers, its most intensive and valuable war training to date, Allied forces in Africa had inflicted on the Germans their worst defeat since Stalingrad. On 11 May 1943, in an unorganized, swift, wholesale surrender, the Germans had given up Africa. Suffering 70,000 casualties, the Allies had captured 266,000 and killed or wounded 60,000 enemy soldiers. Africa was now clear of the Axis. Suez was secure. Sicily, Italy, and Southern France were now threatened by the growing power of Allied arms.

Ernie Pyle said of the Axis debacle in Tunisia: "That colossal German surrender did more for American morale than anything that could possibly have happened. Winning in battle is like winning at poker or catching lots of fish—it's damned pleasant and it sets a man up. As a result the hundreds of thousands of Americans in North Africa were happy men, laughing and working with new spirits that bubbled."

Those spirits were shared, to a lesser degree, by other Americans in training in the United States. It was good to reflect that our side was at last winning big battles. In addition to participating in the increasing Allied optimism about the outcome of the war, the 85th Division, at the end of its maneuvers, was filled with a growing confidence in itself as a skilled fighting team.

With the maneuvers over in late May 1943, speculation was widespread as to the next destination of the 85th. The Division was encamped near Merryville, Louisiana, and Jasper, Texas. Orders were received to turn over all the Division's vehicles to the 42d Division, which was in training at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. To the mechanics and drivers of the 85th, this was equivalent to taking away from a man a fine racehorse which he had groomed and trained until it performed like a champion. These men had worked for months on the vehicles and had acquired almost an affection for them. The convoy was formed, however, and hundreds of vehicles and drivers headed for Camp Gruber.

About a week later, although very few members of the Division knew the destination, the 85th was rolling westward on twenty-eight trains which left Louisiana and three trains which left Oklahoma. Details of the move were coordinated by Lt.Col. Peebles, the Division G-4, who was later to play a large part in the successful operation of the Division staff during combat.

For all anyone knew, the destination could be a West Coast port of embarkation. About three days later, however, the trains stopped rolling and the troops were ordered off. The scene that greeted the disembarking soldiers was indeed a discouraging one. There was no green grass to be seen, there were no sparkling brooks in sight; there were no side-

walks or paved roads; as far as the eye could see there were not only no houses—there was nothing. The 85th had arrived on the desert! The only signs of civilization were the troops and vehicles that were already there and had come to meet the trains and transport the new arrivals to their first desert bivouac. Trucks, armored cars and tanks were swirling about everywhere churning up great clouds of fine white powdered dust, and the men who had come to meet the Custermen were covered with it from their shoes to their helmet liners. The layers of dust were so thick on their faces that their features were hardly recognizable.

It did not take the men long to find out where they were. They had been shipped to Southern California near the Imperial Valley and were to bivouac at Camp Pilot Knob, eleven miles west of Yuma, Arizona. It is doubtful that any soldier who stayed at Camp Pilot Knob left there knowing whence the camp derived its name. Apparently no one ever bothered to find out, since there were so many reasons for never going back. There was nothing permanent about it. It was fashioned out of a flat, barren desert tract much as a boy playing at a beach would mark roads and trails in the sand with his hand or a shovel. The bareness was broken only by the smoke-tree bushes and other shrub-like vegetation. Three thousand pyramidal tents were pitched, and these housed company kitchens, administrative officers, and troops alike. It was now early June of 1943, and the prospect of remaining here in the hot, sandy desert during the summer months was depressing to ponder. There was no shade whatsoever, except that to be found in the tents, and troops can not train for war inside tents. Even in June the days were almost unbearably hot. Orders were issued for an enforced siesta to take place each day from 1200 hours until 1400. Troops were required to go to their tents and relax on their cots for the entire period. It was so hot at this time of day that many men often poured a little water on their cots and undressed and reclined in it in an effort to cool off.

It was soon learned from Division directives that the purpose in sending the 85th to the desert was to "train, maintain, and supply troops realistically as in a theater of operations; to harden troops physically; to train troops mentally for the shock of battle; to conduct fire under realistic battle conditions; to develop tactics, technique and training methods suitable for desert warfare; and to test and develop equipment and supplies . . ."

A tough training program was launched at once, stressing infiltration courses, range firing, unit firing problems, and the firing of live ammunition over the heads of troops.

It was hot enough in midafternoon just to stand still in the shade of a tent; but to crawl along the hot ground in full battle regalia with machine-gun bullets whizzing a scant few inches above one's back was a definite ordeal. Such was the infiltration course. At the sound of a whistle, Custermen, wearing steel helmets, web ammunition belts, and ODs, and carrying packs and rifles, scampered over the top of a mound-protected trench and threw themselves hard and flat on the ground. They began to crawl toward several machine guns which were firing caliber .30 bullets which passed only a few inches above their backs. The dust was at its driest and the pebbles and rocks were hard and uncomfortable and red-hot from the burning sun. Sweat poured profusely down strained and tense brows. They had often practiced crawling on the ground back at Shelby and on maneuvers. First the right knee up, its whole inner surface flat against the ground; then the right arm forward; now the left leg. Forward—a little more; a few more inches. Now, for the first time, the real significance of keeping down low, of crawling flat against the ground, was fully appreciated. The men behind the machine guns were their buddies and expert gunners, and the guns were adjusted so that their fire would be thirty inches above the ground. Even so, to raise one's body even a little off the ground was to come perilously close to the path of the bullets. Then, too, a stray round might be a little low; something might happen at one of the guns and cause the fire to be directed downward. It seemed to the men that they had been crawling for hours. They raised their heads a little and peered out from under the hot, heavy helmets that were falling down over their eyes. The machine guns were a good seventy-five yards away. They had gone only twenty-five yards. It was brutal, tiring work and unbearably hot. Right leg up; crawl a little more; onward—a few more inches. Who was the sergeant who had said, "A good infantryman is one who can take one more step and fire one more shot"? It wasn't difficult to imagine enemy soldiers seated behind those guns. The lesson was well taught.

It was good to get back to camp that night. The intense heat of the day passed with the setting of the sun. Little as there was of it in the way of comfort and relaxation, Camp Pilot Knob was home and sunset time was an eagerly awaited hour of the day. For then, not only did the extreme heat pass, but troops were permitted to purchase soft drinks at the post exchange, which was a pyramidal tent in every area. Every morning trucks left the camp for Yuma where huge supplies of ice and soft drinks were obtained. Part of the ice supply went to the mess sergeants who cooled their foodstuffs in underground iceboxes and the rest went to the PX for that evening hour of relaxation and refresh-

ment. It was actually pleasant in the evening, after a strenuous day, to sit around waiting for the PX to open and watch the desert sun go down. Few things in life are more beautiful to see than a desert sunset, unless it be a sunset or sunrise in mid-ocean. In the Imperial Desert the vastness of the vision was interrupted only by the backdrop of barren mountains. There was little vegetation and no habitation on these mountains. Nature, however, seemed to feel sorry for their ugliness and their loneliness by making them an object of spellbinding beauty at sunset as the flaming rays of the setting sun alternately created areas of light and shadow, throwing quietly over the shoulders of the mountainsides a soft mantle of a dozen different hues of maroon and purple.

The quiet and relaxation of the evening, however, was sharply broken by the great activity each morning. Firing ranges of all types had been constructed and troops left camp for the ranges to fire pistols, machine guns, rifles, artillery pieces—the whole Division arsenal. The 85th seemed to have settled down to a period of development of intense coordinated fire power. Even Lt.Col. John D. Cole's 310th Engineers, whose principal duties in combat were to be maintaining roads and building bridges, took a concentrated course in infantry tactics and spent several days going through small-unit firing problems using live ammunition.

At this point in the Division's training, special emphasis was placed on the thorough development of the efficiency of the small unit. This was the platoon, which was composed of a platoon leader (second lieutenant) and forty to forty-four men. Platoons, as combat in Africa and the Pacific had demonstrated, were often instrumental in turning the tide of a battle. Platoon leadership courses were devised and the Custermen went out in platoons for six-day problems. The responsibility and leadership of individual squad leaders was stressed; for, on the desert, it was easy to get lost. Men had to know how to determine direction, how to safeguard water supplies, how to coordinate with supply units so that they could find their supplies of food and ammunition at the designated points. They had to have some plan of action if they missed the supplies and were forced to go for a day without food or new water supplies.

It was on 24-25 July, during this platoon leadership course, that a platoon of one company of the 337th Infantry became lost northwest of the base camp. The incident was most unfortunate and quite dramatic. Newspapers and magazines throughout the country told the public about the mishap. On its first night out on the six-day problem, the platoon became separated from its food and water supply. The next morning, Lt. Sanford L. Miller, with the platoon guide, Pvt. William

C. Day, set out for base camp for water and were successful in finding their way back to Pilot Knob. It took some time, however, and during their absence Pvt. James H. Nash died from exposure. Sgt. Robert J. Powers and Cpl. Julius Ortega, believing that Lieutenant Miller and Private Day had become lost on their way back to camp, and seeing the grave predicament the platoon was in, with one man already dead, left the platoon and set out in search of food and water. Miller and Day, however, returned from camp with food and water and help. In the meantime Pvt. William P. Kisner, of the Medical Detachment, had become separated somehow from the platoon and was reported missing. The rest of the platoon was returned to base camp and a regimental search was made at once for the missing men. For several days the entire 337th Infantry spread out in a single line over a large area of the desert and walked forward slowly over the hot sand looking for their comrades. Finally Ortega and Powers were found—dead. The search was finally abandoned and Kisner was reported missing.

Desert training was extremely trying on the troops and the Army made every effort to allow men to go on pass whenever possible. San Diego was the nearest large city and it was some 125 miles away, so most of the men went on pass to Yuma, Arizona, and Holtville and El Centro, California. Yuma was the largest of the three, but all were pleasant, friendly towns. The air-conditioned homes and shops offered an indescribable relief from the oppressive heat of the desert. El Centro had a beautiful, large, outdoor swimming pool which was well populated on weekends. Many of the men were able to take advantage of the opportunity to visit outside the United States. This was accomplished by going to the towns of Calexico and Mexicali. The towns faced each other across the United States–Mexican border, Calexico being in California. The derivation of both names, of course, is obvious. The difference between prosperous United States and poorer Mexico was evident at once upon stepping across the border. Calexico had neat shops, fine sidewalks, well paved streets. Mexicali had many dirt roads, poor sidewalks, and shops of much poorer construction. The people, however, were kindly and welcomed the large numbers of servicemen visiting their city.

When the Custermen were beginning to wonder how long they were going to be able to stand Camp Pilot Knob, they received orders to move, on 1 August 1943, to a new desert camp about fifty miles from Camp Young, the headquarters of the Desert Training Center. This new home was called Camp Coxcomb. It lay some 150 miles north of Pilot Knob and was east of Los Angeles about 175 miles. It was sixty miles east of Indio and about 95 miles east of Palm Springs, winter

home of many moving-picture greats. Coxcomb offered little more in the way of comfort than Pilot Knob; however, it did have an air of being a more lasting establishment. The PXs had wooden floors and screens although the roofs were tent canvas. The screened latrines with wooden floors were also more elaborate.

The firing problems were resumed at Coxcomb and the allotment of ammunition to the 85th continued to be generous. About this time, in accordance with new tables of organization put out by the War Department, cannon companies were activated and became integral parts of the 85th Division. There was one of these companies in each of the 85th's three infantry regiments—the 337th, 338th, and 339th. The cannon companies brought artillery fire power to the infantry regiment, for the companies were equipped with 75mm and 105mm howitzers. Husky, intelligent men were selected from other companies and assigned to these new fighting units. These men had to work especially hard. Artillery pieces were new to them; they had to learn how to operate them and how they were to be serviced and maintained. In addition, the tactical use and the effective firing of the weapons had to be studied and practiced. These men frequently worked evenings after their regular day's work was over in an effort to become proficient cannoneers in the shortest possible time, for it was clear that the day of combat for the 85th was not far off.

On 20 August the Division was treated to an interesting and instructive demonstration of the relative fire power of aircraft and infantry. Targets were set up several hundred yards ahead of the troops and P-38 fighter planes swooped over the mountains back of them and down into the valley toward the targets. An impressive amount of fire power was showered on the targets as all planes fired 37mm and caliber .50 and caliber .30 machine guns. The gunners were quite accurate. An infantry battalion, the 2d Battalion of the 339th Infantry, massed on line without regard to any tactical formation, fired all the weapons with which it was armed. These included M-1903 and M-1 rifles, carbines, light and heavy machine guns, 60mm and 81mm mortars, and Browning automatic rifles. The effect was obvious and impressive as the thousands of rounds of ammunition tore into the earth just beyond the targets which they had pierced. It was a convincing demonstration of the power and effectiveness of fire from aircraft, and it proved clearly to the troops that an infantry battalion packs a tremendous punch.

During its stay on the desert, the 85th had seen many a sand twister, both at Pilot Knob and at Coxcomb. These were swirling columns of sand carried along by a miniature tornado and they moved about the desert floor much like the magician's Indian rope, with no visible means

of support. Almost without warning they could spread a sauce of sand over a reasonably palatable meal just deposited in a messkit. But only twice were the Custermen caught in freak desert rain and wind storms. These approached swiftly out of a cloudless sky. The second was the more serious. One day extremely black clouds loomed suddenly on the horizon and moved swiftly toward base camp. In the space of about twenty minutes the wind was roaring through the camp area and the sky had opened, pouring down wind-swept torrents of rain. Thunderclaps were deafening and the lightning was vivid and close. One man standing in a pyramidal tent was struck by lightning and instantly killed. Many of the tents, straining at their ropes and pins, pulled loose and went flying through the air; tents that were more securely fastened to the ground were torn to shreds. One officer, in a regimental headquarters tent at the time, lay sprawled on the floor with both feet and his right hand holding down batches of official papers on the ground, and his left hand reaching up on a table holding down more official documents. As he lay there, he looked out the door of the tent to see all his own clothing, from his tent across the way, flying through the air about eight feet off the ground, hotly pursued by another officer who looked ridiculously like the left end of a football team reaching for a forward pass.

The storm lasted only about an hour, but when it subsided one man was dead, some three hundred tents had been destroyed, and there was enough water-soaked and sand-soiled weekend-pass clothing to keep the cleaners in Indio, Cathedral City, and Palm Springs busy for some time to come.

Desert field exercises were ordered as a preparation for desert maneuvers. They were engaged in by a battalion at a time and involved a meeting engagement with an "enemy detail," an overnight bivouac, and an early morning attack. The exercises were held across the valley from the base camp just before the Palen Pass which ran between the Little Maria and Palen Mountains. The battalion left camp entirely motorized, heading for the battle area. They went off trucks only when their reconnaissance elements encountered the "enemy" and an engagement was imminent. The troops soon found that fighting in the desert is vastly different from fighting in the Louisiana woods and fields. The eye was deceived by distances on the desert. There were no houses, buildings, or trees to use in estimating distances. It was more difficult to maintain contact between platoons and companies. The desert appeared flat, but there were many deep gullies which made lateral motorized and foot contact almost impossible. Hand signals and walkie-talkie radios were in common use.

The Custermen had plenty of ammunition and the backstop of the mountains boomed back a tremendous echo as the artillery fired and the infantry battalion deployed, moved up and fired its rifles, machine guns, and mortars in a deafening, smashing blow that drove the "enemy" back through the pass.

Moving swiftly, the 85th's high command ordered the Division into the field for desert maneuvers in the Little Maria–Palen Mountain area. The regiments moved out of camp completely motorized in a new experiment with rapid movement. Practically bumper to bumper, with the threat of air attack reduced, the jeeps and trucks carried a regiment past a given point in thirty-one minutes.

The first maneuver problem was entered into at once. It involved an elaborate defensive position. If men were hot and uncomfortable on the Louisiana maneuvers they were incalculably more so on desert maneuvers. It took a tremendous effort after a day of fighting to walk thirty yards to the chow line. The sun and the sand were unbearably hot and oppressive. ODs, steel helmets, packs, rifles, ammunition belts, boots and leggings, ammunition boxes, machine-gun barrels and tripods, mortar tubes and baseplates—all were part of the load that had to be carried around and all seemed to weigh a ton each. The additional work and exercise in the hot sun made everyone more thirsty than during less active periods. To make things worse, it was part of the toughening process of the training program to limit the water supply so that the soldier would become accustomed to getting along with only a little water for all his uses, as he might well have to do in desert combat. All the Custermen agreed that nothing in all their training had been more difficult to endure than this first week or so of desert maneuvers.

Fate was benign, however, for that first period was also the last. The maneuvers were suddenly and unexpectedly cut short by War Department instructions, which ordered the 85th back to base camp in preparation for a new movement.

It was now beyond mid-September of 1943. On 19 September Brig.Gen. Jay W. MacKelvie, the commander of 85th Division Artillery, was transferred to command XII Corps Artillery. He had been with the Division since its activation and had achieved an exceptionally high standard of training. The 85th Division Artillery was noted as one of the best artillery units in the entire Army. He was succeeded by Brig.Gen. Pierre Mallett.

The Custer Division, everyone felt, now stood at some kind of crossroads. The Division had been training intensively for sixteen months.

The tide of battle in the Pacific had turned, and the U.S. Sixth Army and the 1st Marine Division were advancing the conquest of western New Britain. Africa had been wrested from the Axis, Fascist Italy had fallen, and a foothold on the continent of Europe had been established by the Salerno landing. The 85th was ripe to go somewhere, although the troops liked to kid themselves that the 85th would never go overseas. Camp Coxcomb was not far from the West Coast. It would certainly be a simple matter to move to a port of embarkation for the Pacific. The oldtime Army sergeants in the Division, however, knowing that the Army seldom does the obviously logical thing, readily believed the rumor that spread quickly around to the effect that the 85th's next camp would be Fort Dix, New Jersey. A few days later the first troop trains carried the advance details of the 85th Division out of the Imperial Desert en route to Fort Dix.

The 85th had completed one of its toughest assignments to date. For the first time, an infantry division had trained on the desert in the full heat of the summer months of June, July, August and September. The Custermen had learned many new lessons and had become exceptionally proficient in firing their weapons, in operating as a unit and in coordinating infantry and artillery action. The men had worked, trained, and lived together a long time now and had acquired respect and confidence in one another.

As the troops rested in troop trains on the fast four-day transcontinental trip, the vast expanse of the United States passed by their windows in continuous panorama. They found it a large and beautiful and rich country—this, their own United States. Broad fields and jagged towering cliffs of New Mexico, resplendent in the purple sunset; the clean green oilfields and the brown wheatfields of Kansas; Iowa with mile after mile of corn; the rich black earth of Illinois and Indiana; Indiana's red barns trimmed with white; Chicago's big busy railyards; the flat plains and the pleasant looking small towns of Ohio; Pennsylvania's rolling green hillsides; and finally, brisk and refreshing in the fall, New Jersey and Fort Dix.

Dix was a wonderful change from the desert. In the first place, being there marked the end of six long months in the field for the 85th. Garrison life was indeed welcome. And for the first time in the military careers of most of the Custermen, they were enjoying the comfort of barracks. Before leaving the desert, all troops whose homes were within a thousand miles of Camp Coxcomb had been granted furloughs. Now with the arrival of the rest of the men at Fort Dix more furloughs were granted. A great number of the men of the Division came from the

East, and were pleased to be stationed so relatively close to New York, Trenton, Elizabeth, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, New Haven, Providence, and Boston.

The 85th stayed at Fort Dix for a little over two months. During that time everyone fired a record course with his primary weapon. Every conceivable kind of firing range and firing course was in operation. The Division established a high record in marksmanship.

Colonel James E. Matthews joined the Division on 11 October 1943, and on 25 October 1943 became commanding officer of the 339th Infantry, replacing Col. Paul J. Vevia.

Toward the middle of October, it became evident that the 85th was being brought up to full TO strength, undoubtedly in preparation for movement overseas. A total of 2,216 replacements arrived to swell the ranks of the Custer Division. They were infantrymen from the 84th and 99th Divisions, medics from Camp Grant, Illinois, and artillerymen from Fort Bragg, North Carolina. A few of the replacements were from the 76th Infantry Division and the 5th Armored Division.

By 31 October 1943 the strength of the 85th was 879 officers, 40 warrant officers, and 14,002 enlisted men.

Movement orders finally came for the Custermen, who had been pretty much on edge for the final three weeks of their stay at Fort Dix. An advance detachment under command of General Gerow, Assistant Division Commander, left for Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. The rest of the 85th slipped quietly out of Fort Dix a few days later for the same destination. On 16 December 1943, General Gerow, accompanied by his advance detachment, boarded HMS *Empress of Scotland* (formerly the *Empress of Japan*) at Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation. He sailed with the rear elements of the 88th Division. These two divisions, the 88th and the 85th, were the first reactivated divisions of the Army of the United States, as distinguished from the Regular and National Guard units of the United States Army, to sail for foreign duty in World War II.

General Coulter and his Chief of Staff, Col. William T. Fitts, Jr., together with Capt. Frank J. Buttner and Lt. Frank M. Kibler, aides to the commanding general, flew to Casablanca and from there to Oran in North Africa.

On the afternoon of 24 December 1943, the USS *General Alexander E. Anderson* sailed from Newport News for Casablanca on its second voyage, carrying the 339th Infantry, Division Headquarters, and the 328th Field Artillery Battalion. The *Anderson* was a fast ship and

sailed without convoy through the submarine-infested waters of the Atlantic.

She was followed by the USS *General William A. Mann*, carrying the 338th Infantry Regiment, the 329th FA Battalion, the 310th Medical Battalion, the 310th Engineer Battalion, and Special Troops.

The remaining elements of the Division, the 337th Infantry, the rest of Division Artillery (910th FA Battalion) and the rest of the Special Troops sailed on New Year's Day of 1944, from Hampton Roads, on HMS *Andes.*

At the close of 1943, two-thirds of the 85th Division was on the high seas en route to North Africa and the battlefields of World War II.

It had been strange to leave the United States. There is always an emotional tug at the heartstrings of the devoted citizen who leaves his native land. When the respective ships that carried the 85th Division sailed, most of the heavily laden troops had gone below to the crowded holds. They had filed up the steep gangplank into the vast ship burdened with steel helmets, overcoats, rifles, belts and canteens, and huge horseshoe packs, and so were glad for the chance to unload. Those who were on deck for the last look at land watched the pier and the Virginia coastline slide away. Everyone felt that a period had come to an end. It was as though the curtain had been run down at the end of an act. It was like graduating from school. A part of the past had been concluded. Something new lay ahead.

Part III: *Into the Line*

AN OCEAN VOYAGE is often recommended as a restful, refreshing vacation. But an ocean crossing in a crowded Army troopship, under constant threat of enemy submarine action, is little less than an ordeal. The holds in which the men spent most of their time were jammed and the air was close. The ship constantly followed a zigzag course, which together with the normal pitch of the sea made life wretched for a large number. Many, however, never before at sea, turned out to be fine sailors.

A considerable number of the men were selected to assist the Navy in manning the ship's guns, and thrice during the day over the ship's loudspeaker came the call: "Army Group B [C, etc.] relieve the watch." This turned out to be a choice assignment. First of all, it was something to do—better than lying on a bunk in the hold trying to drum up an interest in living. It brought a man up on deck where he could breathe some fresh air once in a while. His interest was aroused by the course of instruction in the use of the guns, given by Navy personnel. His senses were whetted by the necessity of remaining alert for possible enemy attacks. Best of all, however, he received three meals per day instead of two. These men were not called upon to fight off the enemy during the voyage, but on the second day out reports went about the ship that a pack of Nazi submarines had been encountered. It is, perhaps, a matter of record that every troopship that left the States reported meeting enemy subs the second day out.

Lifeboat drill, held every morning at 1000 hours, gave all a chance to get up on deck for a quick look at the world before plunging down again into the dullness of the stuffy hold. The ship could be seen following its irregular course, for it left a long, foamy, curving wake—a lighter green than the rest of the endless expanse of the ocean. Lifebelts, which were supposed to be worn at all times, were properly adjusted and each man was instructed in the exact procedure he was to follow in the event of an order to abandon ship.

Since practically no one knew where the ships were going, everyone had his own theory. The ports that seemed to have the largest following among the troops were Southampton, Casablanca, and Sydney, Australia (via the Panama Canal).

The men were by no means isolated from the world, however. Division radio operators took down the news as it came over the ship's short-wave radio in code. Copies were made and news bulletins distributed throughout the ship. Some of the items that appeared were:

"*28 December 1943, Washington, D. C.* In his first conference since his return to the United States from historic conferences at Cairo and Teheran, President Roosevelt announced today that Texas-born General Dwight D. Eisenhower had been selected Supreme Commander for the coming assault against Germany. . . . British announce that the 26,000-ton battleship *Scharnhorst* has been sunk by units of the British Home Fleet off the coast of Norway. . . . General MacArthur announced today that landings by United States troops have been made on the western end of New Britain Island, establishing a second invasion front on Japan's key island in the Southwest Pacific.

"*29 December 1943, Allied Hq., Algiers.* British and Canadian forces of General Sir Bernard Montgomery's historic Eighth Army today captured Ortuna, Italian Adriatic port city. . . . General Vatutin's offensive west of Kiev has broadened into a front two hundred miles wide.

"*31 December 1943.* Germans in full retreat in Kiev and Dnieper Bend offensives."

The first sight of foreign land is a stirring spectacle, no matter how dull the landscape. All the romance and enchantment of foreign countries seen in geography and history books flood the mind as the eye strains to catch the first view of foreign soil. Africa was a place that, perhaps, no member of the 85th had ever expected to visit in his lifetime. Yet here before them, as each ship dropped anchor in the green harbor, lay Casablanca, its white houses basking in the sunlight.

Those who could crowded the rails and looked down on the dock below where incredibly poor-looking beggars, dressed in what appeared to be poor-grade burlap bags, stood about hoping to get a piece of chocolate or a cigarette from the new arrivals. Some of them came to the edge of the dock beside the ship and, looking up, gave signals that made it clear they would enjoy a smoke. The beggars, however, were but part of the scene. Engineers began rigging the nets for the unloading of the cargo. Everywhere, mingled among the natives, could be seen American soldiers dashing here and there, busy about the various tasks connected with disembarking. These troops were looked upon by the newcomers with a certain amount of awe. They had a busy efficiency which suggested that they had been overseas some time, were quite at home, and knew just what they were doing. Apparently over here not all was death and suffering. These men were alive and seemed to be quite healthy and, beyond that, appeared to be enjoying their work. Later the Custermen found that large numbers of them were combat veterans who had been wounded in Tunisia, Sicily, or Italy, and had been sent here where they could still perform service.

The 339th Infantry, Division Headquarters, and the 328th FA Battalion, first units of the 85th to arrive, began unloading from the *Anderson* on the afternoon of their arrival, 2 January 1944. Waiting U.S. Army trucks took them, duffel bags and all, and whisked them through the streets of Casablanca, giving them brief glimpses of turbanned, barefoot, white-gowned Arabs, dirty streets, and dirty-white buildings. A few miles outside the city, in surprisingly pleasant-looking green countryside, the troops were deposited at Camp Don B. Passage, named after the first American soldier killed in the invasion of North Africa. The rest of the Division followed the 339th by three days to a week.

Camp Passage was rather bare and had little to offer. It was just a stopping-off place. Each unit that arrived remained only about three days. Chow was served to groups the size of a battalion and it was a long wait. It was January and the nights there were penetratingly cold. Living accommodations were pyramidal tents floored with wood. Ration cards were issued for the camp PX.

Oran was the 85th's next destination, and at the docks at Casablanca three shifts of Italian POWs were loading food and ammunition for General Clark's Fifth Army in Italy, as well as the equipment of the 85th, onto flatcars for shipment eastward. Few groups of men throughout the war ever worked harder or faster than these Italian prisoners. Whatever their motive, whether it was to earn something to eat, relief at being rid of the Fascist yoke and an earnest desire to help the Allied cause, or an ungrounded fear of being executed, they worked with physical fury, carrying on their backs what seemed to be superhuman loads.

The only difference between the transportation provided for the ammunition, food and equipment and that provided for the troops was that the cars in which the latter rode had four walls and a roof. The Custermen had often seen American Legion parades back in the States and had watched the antics of the 40-and-8 Society. But the chagrin was great indeed when they found that they were actually going to ride, for three days, in these old World War I French cars which had a capacity, so it said on the side of each car, for "Hommes 40 Chevaux 8" (40 men or 8 horses). They were nothing more than small freight cars, with a sliding door midway on each side. Thirty enlisted men and one officer were packed into each car. Only thirty-one were put aboard because the men were going to have to sleep on the cars two nights. But as it was, only about twenty-seven could fit, mathematically, lying down on the floor. Water for each car was provided in a Lyster bag which had to be set up in the center of the car, and which sloshed about

all night at every bend of the tracks, splashing water on half of the sleepless occupants. The only consolation on the trip, which provided constant passage through long, smoke-filled tunnels, was the great beauty of the mountain scenery between Casablanca and Oran.

The next camp was not actually in Oran but was located about sixty miles south of it near a small Algerian town called St. Denis-du-Sig. Consternation was complete when the troops, after walking a long two miles from the point where the train stopped, filed into a large open area entirely inclosed by barbed wire. Most of the men were too tired to try to figure out why they were being put behind barbed wire, so they retired—on pallets of straw. The next day they learned that they were encamped in a former prisoner-of-war camp and that the barbed wire was soon to be removed.

From all anyone could gather, this was the end of travelling for a while. It was now 17 January 1944 and training schedules were out indicating a period of six weeks of intensive mountain training. In Louisiana, the 85th had learned that certain tactics were required for fighting in wooded, gently sloping terrain. In the desert's flat, barren, sandy ground, they had had to learn a new set of rules covering fire, movement, cover and concealment. And now in the high, green, rolling mountains of North Africa, they started all over again. They learned many things about mountain fighting. They found that experience in marching and attacking over mountainous terrain was essential if a division were to develop its timing, maintain its contacts, and know the extent of its stamina. Climbing over mountains, they discovered, seemed to put into use sets of back and leg muscles they did not know they possessed. And it became clear that if they were destined to do any mountain fighting, it would be necessary to continue to climb mountains in order to develop those muscles.

It was shortly after the 85th began this period of platoon, company, and combat-team phases of mountain training that the British Broadcasting Corporation flashed word of a new and dramatic development in the fighting in mountainous Italy. The announcer, crisply enunciating each word, solemnly reported:

"Allied forces made a new, successful landing yesterday [22 January 1944] on the west coast of Italy south of Rome and well behind the German forces now engaging the Fifth Army. First eyewitness accounts of the landing came from Allied pilots who flew shore patrol over the area of invasion. The pilots said they watched the spearhead troops of Americans and British commandos swarm ashore. The first landings evidently took the Germans by surprise, for there was little opposition.

Heavy fighting has since developed, however . . . The Allied amphibious forces were transported by ships of the American, British, and Greek navies, as American, British, and French forces launched a concerted attack on Cassino to coincide with the landing."

It can be readily understood that the 85th, taking mountain training in North Africa, which is not too far removed from Italy, was intensely interested in the combat developments there. Many of the men expected that the Division would be sent there. Others believed the rather strong rumor that the Custer Division was slated to join a huge Allied invasion through the Balkans under the command of General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, as part of the British Ninth or Tenth Army, stationed in the Near East.

All the guessing was hopelessly scrambled, however, when, with but four of the six weeks of mountain training completed, the 85th was ordered to move out of the mountains to Port-aux-Poules, Algeria, on the Mediterranean coast, for amphibious training in the Fifth Army Invasion Training Center. To add to the credibility of the now-growing rumor that the 85th would be part of an amphibious assault on southern France, an engineer boat and shore regiment, which works on the beaches during a landing, and antiaircraft units were attached to the 85th Division. The 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was also attached. There were few now who did not think that an amphibious operation was in the making.

Colonel Brookner W. Brady had been assigned to the 85th Division on 1 February 1944. He was to serve as an advisor and director of the amphibious training program.

As the liberal arts colleges lay claim to producing the "well rounded man," the Custermen felt they were now in a position to claim the title of the U.S. Army's most well rounded division. Maneuvers, desert warfare training, mountain warfare training, and now amphibious training. What next?

There was much to learn, and to be careful about, in amphibious warfare training. Here, again, a whole new set of rules had to be learned. An invasion of enemy-held territory by sea could be extremely dangerous even apart from casualties caused by enemy fire. There were different types of landings. Men were sometimes landed directly from the larger landing craft, the LCIs (landing craft, infantry), and sometimes from the smaller assault boats, the LCVPs (landing craft, vehicle-personnel). In the latter, the men went over the side, some distance from shore, from larger vessels, the LCTs (landing craft, tank). In pitch darkness, they climbed down rope ladders to the LCVPs tossing

dangerously below in the heavy sea. Safely aboard these, they circled, it seemed for hours, in one spot waiting for other craft to join the force and waiting for H-hour, minus the time it would take to get to shore. In one unfortunate accident, after the craft had stopped circling and were headed shoreward, a whole boatload of men of the 339th Infantry was pitched into the cold water in the early morning darkness, when the improperly fastened ramp at the bow of one craft suddenly dropped. The men were loaded down with their rifles and equipment, and the wonder of the affair was that so many men were saved. Four were drowned. The rest were rescued by their own heroic efforts and the swift action of nearby craft.

Landings from LCIs were, apparently, no less dangerous. The troops filed from the LCIs by way of a movable stairway that was lowered at the proper time along the port side of the vessel. The idea was to bring the boats in far enough so that the men could step off the last step into water about waist- or chest-deep. Rough seas, however, often kept their skippers from getting them in as far as they would like to. In another unfortunate disaster, an L Company man of the 339th Infantry was drowned when, together with several of his buddies, he stepped off into what he thought was waist-deep water, only to sink right down clear out of sight.

The 85th had three weeks of amphibious training, and during this period acquired a new regimental commander, Col. Oliver W. Hughes, who was assigned to command the 337th Infantry. Colonel Hughes, short and fatherly, with flashing brown eyes, came to the Custer Division from the 78th Infantry Division. He possessed a wealth of military knowledge and leadership qualities and proved to be one of the best regimental commanders the Division ever had.

The Division was now launched upon a program of rotation between the towns of Arzew, St. Denis-du-Sig, and Chanzy, where the combat teams took amphibious, mountain, and leadership and battle training, respectively. But this program had hardly started when the 339th Infantry, which had set up camp again at St. Denis-du-Sig, received sudden, unexpected orders for a movement by water. The orders were restricted to the 339th and did not affect the rest of the Division. The men of that regiment, of course, were agog with curiosity and anticipation. On the evening of 8 March 1944, they received the sudden orders and in the late afternoon of 10 March, less than forty-eight hours later, sailed from the port of Oran on HMS *Letitia.* The rest of the Division received similar orders three days later and, on 24 March 1944, the 85th Division (less the 339th Infantry) sailed in convoy from Mers-el-Kébir, Algeria,

on the SS *Nightingale,* SS *Lyon,* SS *Stanton,* HMS *Letitia,* and HMS *Almanzora.* These ships anchored in the harbor of Naples, Italy, on 27 March 1944.

In the meantime, the 339th Infantry, which had sailed on 10 March, had arrived in Naples in the late afternoon of the 14th. The regiment was met at the dock by its commander, Col. James E. Matthews, who had flown from Oran and who now came aboard ship. He more than mildly shocked his officers by telling them that he had already been up in the front lines as an observer with the 88th Division and that an advance party from the 339th would go up to the lines that very night. By 16 March the 339th had relieved the 349th Infantry of the 88th Division. The 339th, the only infantry unit of the World War I 85th Division to see actual combat, became the first regiment of the reactivated Division to see combat in World War II.

Naples in peacetime had been the mecca of many visitors. By day, the blue waters of its curving, spacious harbor turned to a shimmering gold in the brilliant Neapolitan sunlight. By night, balconies and terraces in homes and public places high up in the mountains that ringed the harbor like tiers of an opera house afforded an excellent view of the soft, silver carpet spread across the bay by a full golden moon. The resort hotels along the waterfront offered excellent cuisine and a choice view. And from there tourists were wont to embark upon their expeditions to Mount Vesuvius and to Pompeii. A large part of Naples, even in prewar days, consisted of poor, crowded tenement districts, many of them near the waterfront, but many also well scattered throughout the city along its narrow, winding streets and alleys. Poverty was common, but not starvation.

When the men of the 85th Division arrived in Naples, the most forceful impression they received was the prevalence of acute hunger among the populace. Second only to this was the immense devastation wrought in the harbor and along the waterfront by both Allied and German bombing and by German demolition work. There was hardly a hotel, warehouse, or tenement or, in fact, a building of any description along the waterfront that had not been reduced to a shell or to one grotesque, crumbling wall, or to a pile of rubble. The Allied Commission in Italy, which concerned itself with the military government of Allied occupied cities, found the state of the city of Naples to be "appalling." Food was short. Water was scarce; the mains had been badly damaged by the Germans' methodical destruction; the main acqueduct had been blown in several places, and all the reservoirs except one had

been drained. The remaining reservoir was taken over by the AMG and the water strictly rationed. Ten days after the first Allied troops had entered the city, the water supply had been restored. German destruction of the sewer system was equally complete, and seriously feared epidemics were averted only by fortuitous heavy rains. The fall of 1943 and the winter of 1943-44 had been difficult for the Neapolitans, but thanks to the emergency measures of AMG, widespread starvation had been prevented.

Hunger, however, persisted. When the Custer Division came to Naples in March 1944, it found that AMG had hired Italian civilians to aid in the unloading of food and ammunition. The Germans had made every effort to make the harbor facilities useless to the Allies. The ingenuity of PBS (Peninsular Base Section) engineers, however, turned the sunken ships into docks, over which many of the troops and some of the supplies came. A large part of the supplies, however, were loaded onto barges from the ships off shore and taken directly onto the beaches. There the Neapolitans had been engaged to aid in the unloading. It was amusing to see their eagerness to unload the huge stores of K and C rations, in preference to ammunition. It was surprising how many cases of rations turned up damaged and had to be set aside. It was not long before the pile of damaged cases was sizable; and guards had to be placed over them to prevent the civilian laborers from making off with the rations ear-marked for General Clark's troops.

When the 339th Infantry arrived at Naples on the afternoon of 14 March 1944, many officers and a large number of enlisted men were assigned the task of supervising and assisting the civilian laborers. One of the officers became exasperated at the lack of work he was getting out of the Italians. They were obviously hungry and, although he was anxious to unload ammunition and clothing, the laborers insisted on clustering about the barge which contained the rations. He climbed up on a pile of boxes and in his best Italian, developed after several hours in the country, struck a bargain with the workers. He extracted the promise that they would unload everything if he gave them something to eat. With that he broke open a couple of damaged cases of C rations and was almost seriously hurt in the stampede that followed. The civilians reached and strained and clawed at the cans of food, knocking one another down and fighting viciously for their share. The troops in the vicinity stood aside and looked with mingled amazement and pity as these grown men scratched and beat at one another and then, having finally obtained some of the food, devoured the contents of a can of C rations. Their hunger partially satisfied, they fell to with amazing energy and piled the beach high with the contents of the barges.

Shortly after midnight the same night, while the unloading of supplies was still in progress, the Italians, for no apparent reason, began to leave the beach. They seemed to be going in groups in three different directions. Before the Custermen had time to try to figure out the strange action, they noticed what seemed to be a heavy fog creeping over the beach area. The "fog," however, lacked the dampness of real fog. They suddenly realized that the Chemical Warfare Service was covering Naples with a blanket created by smoke pots. That meant that enemy aircraft were on the way and that the Italians, sensing the impending raid, had departed for the air-raid shelters. The unloading was called off temporarily by mutual consent and the Custermen followed the Italians. But the shelters were jammed and not even all the Italians, who had had a head start, could squeeze in; so the men returned to the beach. By now the antiaircraft guns defending Naples had opened up and the sky over the city and the harbor was filled with a fascinating pattern of thousands of interlacing tracers. It was a truly magnificent sight. The Custermen merely stood on the beach and watched, for it was a show many, many times the volume and beauty of any fireworks display they had ever seen in the States. German planes were suddenly heard zooming and swooping over the harbor. Antiaircraft 90mm guns, silent until then, now opened up on the beach a few feet behind them. The noise and confusion was indescribable. Since this was their first air raid, the men were not sure at first whether this new noise was the fire of friendly antiaircraft guns or the explosion of enemy bombs. However, no one stopped to analyze the matter. Almost without realizing it, everyone had hit the dirt, seeking some form of shelter from possible flying bomb fragments. Some of the men landed in holes full of mud and water; others burrowed under piles of barracks bags; several sought comfort under some Army tanks on the beach; and a few clawed into the ground near and under a line of railway flatcars loaded with bombs for the Air Forces, an interesting fact which they did not discover until daylight the following morning.

In the meantime, on HMS *Letitia,* where a detail of men and officers of the 339th was loading the barges from the hold of the ship, the AA fire and the diving enemy planes were causing equal confusion. One man almost fell into the hold when the AA guns opened fire; others scampered below deck; some jumped into the ship's lifeboats, pulling the canvas covers up over them; several buried themselves under cases of C rations in the bottom of the barges; one man reported afterward that he had been standing at the stern of the ship watching the fireworks when a dud from an enemy bomber whistled past him and plunged into the water about fifteen yards from the ship. Someone else reported

that one of the bombs had scored a direct hit on a small Italian fishing boat, killing five occupants.

It must be remembered that in air attacks such as this, directed against a great port, many thousands of civilians as well as the military had to endure the danger, the anxiety, the discomfort, and the fear that accompanied them. Naples was a large city and in addition to housing its own teeming population, it was host to thousands of refugees—homeless, destitute, and frightened people. The civilians seemed to have an uncanny premonition that air raids were coming. At an early hour at night, many of them were on their way to the air-raid shelters scattered everywhere. The rest waited until the smoke pots were set off or the air-raid siren set up its persistent, eerie wail throughout the blacked-out city.

The air-raid shelters of Naples were among the deepest of any city in Europe and therefore offered substantial protection. But that was all that could be said for them. They were dank and dreary and dark. They consisted of narrow tunnels dug far, far into the ground and reached by what seemed to be endless flights of steps twisting and turning as they descended ever downward, deep into the very bowels of the earth. Prehistoric animals never burrowed deeper into the heart of this planet. There was no electricity in the shelters and the atmosphere of terror only seemed to be intensified by the candles, carried by the shabbily dressed, wide-eyed victims, which cast huge, grotesque shadows on the damp dirt walls. Outside, overhead, could be heard the roar of enemy planes, the chilling whistle of falling bombs, and the answering thunder of antiaircraft fire. The tunnels were long, but only about ten yards wide, and into them were jammed thousands of persons. They stood along the walls, or sat hunched and miserable on the dirt floor. Most of them were old and many were without shoes. Every face was lined with the marks of the care, anxiety, sorrow, and fear that they had suffered in these recent months. Here and there in the tunnels could be heard the shrill, tense voice of a frightened child or the pitiful crying of a distressed and bewildered baby. As the walls trembled under the impact of exploding bombs falling in the vicinity of a shelter, the old women, frantically thumbing rosaries, constantly made the sign of the cross, crying out, "*Santa Maria, Madre di Dio . . .*"

This air attack was the Custer Division's first clash with the enemy in World War II and the men on detail in Naples that night had the dubious distinction of being the first to come under enemy fire in a combat zone. Although the Custermen could do nothing to fight back, they were tremendously impressed with the power and efficiency of the men who could and did fight back—the antiaircraft gunners, the search-

light operators, and the night-fighter pilots. They realized with a rush that they were now part of the fighting end of the war and their spirits were greatly bolstered by the display of Allied military strength.

Naples, however, was a rear area. The front line was some forty miles to the north where, the following night, the rest of the 339th began the relief of the 349th Infantry of the 88th Division. Here, for the first time too, the 85th was going into the front lines. The Fifth Army line at this time ran from Cassino generally in a southwesterly direction to the Ligurian Sea. It ran a few miles north of the Garigliano River, for, at the time of the landing at Anzio, the main Fifth Army forces, which then included British troops on the left flank, had stormed across the river and had driven northward against severe German resistance. Little progress had been made, for the attack brought the Fifth Army only as far as Castelforte and to a point a short distance beyond Minturno.

The offensive had not been planned primarily to gain ground, but chiefly to pin down the bulk of the enemy's forces so that they could not be withdrawn to aid resistance to the Anzio invasion. It had taken the British ten days of hard fighting to get from the river to the points where the offensive was finally stopped. During that time many men on both sides had died. In the no man's land between the opposing lines, the bodies of German and British soldiers still lay where they fell; and the men of the 339th Infantry, from their newly occupied positions in their sector of the Fifth Army line, could see them and smell them.

It is easy to say that, for the first time, a regiment took up positions in the front line; but it is not at all simple to represent accurately the lifetime of emotional reaction to that operation. By going into the front line on 15, 16 and 17 March, the men of the 339th became members of that exclusive club of "combat soldiers." Membership in the club was the least desired of any in the world, and the initiation to it was unquestionably the most harrowing. No one knew just what to expect. Here at last, after twenty-two months of unrelenting training, they had been ordered into battle. Everyone was excited and everyone wondered just what it would be like. Their curiosity, discomfort, and fear, which were to be duplicated a few weeks later by the rest of the 85th as it moved to the Fifth Army front, increased as they advanced toward the lines. They had left the bivouac area in 2½-ton trucks, workhorses of World War II. The amount of clothing and equipment which swathed each man was generous to the point of rendering him immobile. In addition to an overcoat and a raincoat, clothing included a field jacket, a combat suit, ODs, and in many cases, long underwear. Every back

was weighted down with a full field pack which included two blankets, weapons, and special equipment. Platoon jokesters, of course, taking their cue from all this gear, made the obvious comment for the occasion: "What do we do if we have to fight?"

The trucks drove for some distance, using headlights, until they reached the light line, where all lights had to be extinguished. Here was the first of many tense moments. It was at this point that the men realized that from here on up their movements could be spotted by enemy observers. Turning the lights off had the same effect as walking from the bright sunlight into an unlighted basement. Not only the troops packed in the trucks, but the drivers as well, could hardly see their hands before them. It was now pouring rain and the drivers, as they neared the front, found themselves on little more than muddy wagon trails, or abandoned railroad beds, barely wide enough for one truck, flanked with an eight- to ten-foot drop on each side. Driving was not by vision, but by intuition.

The trucks went as far as they could and the men finally detrucked and lined up, one behind another on each side of the narrow, slippery, rain-drenched road, prepared to go the rest of the way on foot. They were warned by guides who had preceded them to the area to watch their step and keep on the trail because the fields on each side were mined. It was pitch dark and the rain was driving, miserable, and soaking. The columns started off toward the front and each man literally hung onto the man in front of him in order to maintain contact. It was an uncomfortable, exasperating business. Already filled with apprehension, soaked with rain, and sagging under a heavy, cumbersome load, if a man let go of the man in front in order to regain his balance on the slippery, muddy trail, he soon lost him. And having lost him he could not easily locate him, for it was pitch black. If he ran ahead quickly in an effort to regain his position, he might plunge off the side of the trail into the adjacent field, land on a mine and get himself and many others blown to pieces. If he picked his way slowly forward to be sure of his direction, he would certainly fall far behind and delay the rest of the column. Guides—officers and noncommissioned officers, some of whom had been over the trail before—tried frantically to keep the men moving forward at a good pace, but many of them slid off the trail themselves or fell headlong into mudholes. Major John W. Hesse, regimental plans and training officer (S-3), of Quincy, Illinois, did an exceptionally calm and efficient job of coordinating the advance of this foot movement.

One incident contributed to everyone's growing jumpiness. As the men were hurrying along the trail toward the position which they were

soon to occupy, a battery of tank destroyer guns opened fire from their positions in a field just off to the right of the trail. The explosions were sharp and ear-splitting. As one man said, "I almost jumped out of my soggy clothes." Most of the men thought they were enemy shells landing nearby.

If Hollywood had filmed this whole scene at the time it was taking place, movie patrons would have taken some of the details of misery and apprehension with a grain of salt. The pitch blackness of the night, broken intermittently by flashes of artillery fire; the driving rain which soaked to the skin; the pitifully narrow, muddy trails; the mines; the difficulty of maintaining contact; the exhaustion of the march; the weight of the load; the treacherous footing; the slipping and falling, not once, but twice, three times, having to be helped up by two others; all tended to make everyone nervous and jumpy.

The first few nights in the line there were many close calls. Many men were almost shot by their own squad members as some of the latter jumped and pointed a weapon at every sound and every shadow. The men in the most forward positions were the most nervous of all, as well they might be. In some places the Germans were only thirty yards from them, across a narrow no man's land. They were so close that the first night the 339th went into the line, the Germans, sensing a relief of a unit and the arrival of green troops, crept up to one foxhole and captured two men. One company commander said, "The Germans are so close they can reach over and crack my men on the knuckles with a broom."

One officer, approaching the regimental headquarters in the inky blackness of the night, was suddenly confronted by a guard who leaped out from behind a bush and leveled a trembling pistol at his heart. In the near panic that seized him, the officer related, he forgot the password and it was several seconds before he could think of it. He couldn't understand why the guard hadn't shot him. Having identified himself, he shakily commended the guard for his alertness and hurriedly went on his way.

In an important change of command on 28 March 1944, Col. Brookner W. Brady relieved Colonel Matthews as CO of the 339th Infantry. Colonel Brady graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in June 1926. A resident of Los Angeles and son of Col. James F. Brady, Coast Artillery Corps (retired), of Berkeley, California, he had served as a company commander, a battalion commander, and a regimental executive officer. He had also been assistant commandant of the Provost Marshal General's School and had attended the Army's Signal

School and the Infantry School battalion commanders' course at Fort Benning. Colonel Brady was of medium height, stocky, and physically active. He had been a member of the U.S. Olympic Team (Modern Pentathlon Event) in Los Angeles in 1932.

Colonel Matthews was hospitalized and transferred from the Division. Matthews had been greatly loved by his men. He had first won his way into their hearts when he came storming down the pier at Newport News when the troops were drinking Red Cross coffee prior to embarking on the *Anderson*. "Throw those damned cups on the pier, boys; we don't have to police up here," he shouted. In a letter addressed to the men of his regiment at the time of his transfer he said:

"My Soldiers:

"This day I voluntarily relinquish my post as your commanding officer. In doing so I salute you as the flower of American manhood, the finest she has produced.

"Then why do I leave you? In order that our relationship may not be weakened through misunderstanding, I offer to you this explanation and farewell . . . This is not as superior officers to junior nor colonel to enlisted man. It is as man to man—the way you know I love you best.

"Since I salute you as our country's finest, I also declare with that salute that you are therefore entitled to the vigor and youth of America's finest leadership. A man of my age cannot take the terrific punishment similar to that which you have just experienced, and which I also experienced, although in a different position, for fourteen days. It means that in the crucial period when one more ounce of energy can give us victory, a younger leader can produce where a man of my age cannot. I . . . recently brought up the subject with our commanding general so that he could seek the type of successor to which you are entitled. My release has been considered advisable so that I may undergo an operation for an infected bladder . . .

"Down under the hill from which you just staggered in a blinding snowstorm, there is a little stone building. This was used as our morgue. When one of our soldier dead rested there, when possible, I always went in alone to commune in silence with his departed soul. I looked on his dead face until tears blinded my vision. If that be weakness, then I am weak. If that be indicative of poor command, then I am a poor commander. I mention it only that you may know that, as necessity arose, I could see you die, but that my heart also suffered with each and every death. I also mention it so that you may know that though his body is dead and his soul departed that I still wanted him to know I

kept the faith just as he had with me and his country when he gave his life.

"And now in my absence I know that we, you and I, will keep the same faith. You are still mine and I am yours. My prayers and my heart are with you. I know, my soldiers, you will not falter and you cannot fail. May your insignia alone chill with fear the heart of the Boche. May God's richest blessing be in store for each and every one of 'my boys'."

Meanwhile, the rest of the 85th Division had arrived in Italy. An observer party of 127 officers and 128 enlisted men, under the command of the Assistant Division Commander, Brig.Gen. Lee S. Gerow, was sent forward to the front and was attached to the 88th Division. This party represented a selection of key personnel from all units of the Division. Their mission was to observe conditions on the front line and to work alongside the men who held corresponding positions in the 88th Division. The experience gained by this party proved invaluable when the entire Division was later committed.

While these men were up in the front lines, the Division's rear detachment was still en route from Africa, with four hundred drivers and a like number of motor vehicles. The Division command post, however, was at Naples, functioning in a large, bare, substantially constructed concrete building which had formerly served as a guardhouse. It had no furnishings of any description, but was strongly built, which was a comfort to the occupants at the times of German air attacks on the Naples area. All other units in the same area, designated as Sub-Area 1, were also housed in concrete buildings. Sub-Area 3 was about four miles north of Sub-Area 1, and was located at the bottom of an extinct volcano. The units that were bivouacked in this area had to make a long, tiring march up a narrow road to the top of the crater and then trek the long distance down along its inside.

Conditions at the staging area were temporary and rather makeshift. Supply is important for a division, and much of the 85th's either had not arrived in Italy or had not been brought out from the port of Naples. All supply personnel, under the able direction of the G-4, Lt.Col. Peebles, were especially active during this period, getting vehicles and equipment unloaded in Naples and moved out to the various units. The arrival of the Division rear detachment in Naples on 3 April and the prompt unloading and the dispatch of the drivers, vehicles, and equipment, did much to alleviate the transportation shortage and permit the Division to proceed with its normal functions.

On 3 April 1944, the Division established a forward command post

in an olive grove about ten miles behind the front. The spot was at the base of the northern side of Mount Massico, four miles southeast of Cellole. Besides the Division CP, other units in the same general area were the CP of 85th Division Artillery; detachment of 85th Division Headquarters Company; Headquarters Battery, 85th Division Artillery; and the 85th Signal Company.

In the rear areas, on the south side of Mount Massico, were the rear echelon of 85th Division Headquarters and the 85th Quartermaster Company in Mondragone; the 310th Medical Battalion, 310th Engineer Battalion, 85th Reconnaissance Troop, and 785th Ordnance Company in the vicinity of Mondragone. Combat Team 337 was in a training area northeast of Sant' Angelo. Farther to the rear, in the vicinity of Qualiano, Combat Team 338 was engaged in an active training program in preparation for the time the Division, as a whole, would be committed and face the enemy. They participated in exercises in mountain warfare, attack of villages, and stream crossings.

The artillery managed to get up and have a taste of battle before the rest of the Division. The 910th and 403d Field Artillery Battalions were attached to the 88th Division and were in positions supporting the front-line units of that Division.

During this period, also, the 85th acquired some new units. II Corps headquarters attached to it the 756th Tank Battalion, a detachment of the 6681st Signal (Pigeon) Company, and the 5th Mule Pack Group (Italian).

All combat units of the Division sent representatives at this time to two schools which were operating. These were the Special Scouting and Patrolling School conducted by Fifth Army, and the Mine Warfare School conducted by the 85th Division's 310th Engineer Battalion.

On 8 April 1944, the Division received orders from II Corps to take over a portion of the Fifth Army line. General Coulter and his staff immediately set about the task of working out with General Sloan of the 88th Division the details of this important move. The 339th Infantry was already in line, holding down the extreme left sector of the entire Fifth Army line which was anchored on the beaches bordering the Tyrrhenian Sea, near Minturno. General Coulter now ordered forward Company L plus one platoon of Company M, 338th Infantry. These units were attached to the 339th Infantry and moved into part of the front-line areas held by the 339th. The 329th Field Artillery Battalion was also ordered forward to occupy positions in support of the front line and to be prepared to fire at 2310 hours on 8 April. Company C, 310th Medical Battalion, and one platoon of the Clearing Company, 310th Medical Battalion, were now also in forward positions

and prepared for the evacuation of casualties. One platoon of the 85th Reconnaissance Troop was placed as a guard over the bridge across the Garigliano River, about two miles southeast of Minturno. This bridge, built and maintained by the engineers and protected by antiaircraft guns and the smoke pots of the Chemical Warfare Service, was to carry all traffic to the forward areas of the 85th Division. The rest of the troop was assigned the mission of patrolling the coast, watching for any enemy attempt to encircle the Division's flank by amphibious operations and apprehending enemy agents put ashore from small boats on the beaches behind the Fifth Army line.

Part IV: *The Road to Rome*

At 0800 hours, 10 April 1944, the 85th Division was committed to action as a unit for the first time in its history. At this hour, command of the left (coastal) sector of the II Corps zone passed to the Commanding General, 85th Division. The front line in this sector covered approximately 5,500 yards and extended from the Tyrrhenian Sea at a point east of Scauri to a point north of Minturno.

In order to have a clear picture of the tremendous offensive in which the 85th participated almost exactly a month later, it is well to understand some of the geography of the area and to be acquainted with details of the enemy forces which were overcome.

The Tyrrhenian coast runs west from Minturno and Scauri to Formia. About six miles beyond the Minturno bridge and about one mile beyond Scauri, is the Croce road junction where the road south from Cassino joins Highway 7. West of the junction, for five miles, the highway crosses a narrow plain, dominated by Mount Campese, to Formia, where the mountains come down to the sea. At Formia, the Gaeta Peninsula juts off to the south, but the highway cuts sharply northwest across the mountains to Itri and Fondi, at the northern limit of the Fondi Plain. The road turns southwest at Fondi and crosses level plains for five or six miles. Skirting the mountains, it then runs another five miles to Terracina, built between high rocks and the sea. Flanking Highway 7 on the north are two massive mountain ranges, one running east of Fondi and one west of it. The former are the Arunci Mountains and the latter the Ausoni Mountains.

The Gustav Line, which the Germans had boasted would not be broken, was anchored on the Tyrrhenian coast at Scauri, just south of Highway 7. From there the line ran generally in a north-northeasterly direction, paralleling the Garigliano River, swinging east of Ausonia and cutting at right angles across the Liri River and the Liri Valley to Highway 6 and Cassino. Some seventy-three miles to the northwest lay Rome, capital of Italy, and the principal objective of the offensive scheduled for May 1944. Between Rome and the Gustav Line lay the Anzio Beachhead, a latent, powerful threat to the enemy's rear.

The units of the German Army occupying the sector of the Gustav Line opposite the 85th Division at this time consisted of elements of the 94th Infantry Division. German frontline units running in a line generally northeast from Mount Scauri and Scauri were the 1st Bat-

talion, 274th Infantry; 2d Battalion, 276th Infantry; 1st Battalion, 276th Infantry; and the 194th Fusilier Battalion; all being organic units of the 94th Division. Formed in 1939 from reservists, the German 94th Division had participated in the French campaign of 1940 and had been engaged on the southern sector of the Russian front where it had been virtually destroyed at Stalingrad. It was next identified in July 1943 in Italy, where it had been re-formed and where it had been in action since October 1943. It was rated as a first-class combat division.

During this period of the latter part of April and the first part of May 1944, the front lines were stabilized. There had been little change now for two months. Both sides were well dug in and positions were reinforced with sandbags, steel rails, timber, or any other material that afforded protection from opposing fire. Here the Custermen became accustomed to a condition that was to prevail all the rest of the way up the boot of Italy, all the way to the Po Valley. The Germans were entrenched in the lofty mountain peaks and held all the commanding terrain features in the area. They had direct observation into both the Division's forward and rear areas. They would launch small-arms or artillery fire against any movement on the Division's front lines. During daylight in most of the rear areas any movement, other than in single vehicles, would bring down a quick concentration of enemy artillery fire. Tremensuoli, a small, ruined town held by the 85th in a slight salient in the front lines, was a favorite enemy target. The troops stationed in the town named the main street "Purple Heart Alley" and, from experience, they accurately estimated that a man could appear on the street for no longer than twenty seconds without drawing enemy fire.

Both sides maintained an active defense of their lines, sending out nightly patrols for security, information, and prisoners. During many phases of the Italian Campaign there were what probably appeared to be monotonous reports of "patrols were active on the Italian Front," carried in the newspapers and over the radios in the United States and other countries. Perhaps the chief reason for this "inactivity" was the treacherous, steep, mountainous terrain, with its poor network of roads. In heavy snow or in the deep, slick mud that followed heavy rains, it was literally impossible to move tanks, bulldozers, and heavy guns up precipitous mountain sides. The most sensible thing to do was to await favorable weather.

The patrols, however, went out all the time, every night, in all kinds of weather—rain or snow, mud, sleet, ice, cold, or hail. Patrolling was a highly important and dangerous assignment. Patrol leaders generally went to an observation post by daylight in order to study the terrain, plan the route, and compute the distance to be covered that night. The

patrol leader and the battalion intelligence officer (S-2) studied the terrain and then a map of the same ground, analyzing the defensive potentialities of the enemy position. Some of the questions which were expected to be answered by the patrol's report upon completion of the night's assignment were:

(1) Were any positions located?
(2) Was the enemy outpost position penetrated, or is the main position well screened?
(3) Is there a covered route of approach to this position?
(4) What about the ground? Is it dry or swampy? Can vehicles cover it?
(5) Are there positions of defilade en route for supporting heavy weapons?
(6) Is there wire anywhere?
(7) What about mines and booby traps?
(8) Is there any evidence of enemy shift in position, relief, preparation for attack or withdrawal?
(9) Any evidence of counter patrolling?
(10) Any sounds of tracked vehicles or trucks?

Captain Jim Herndon, of Illinois, as active and keen a regimental S-2 as ever held the job, constantly stressed this advice:

"The composition of patrols is a challenging problem. The terrain and the enemy attitude must be clearly evaluated. On some occasions only a small patrol can stand a chance of accomplishing its mission by stealth; at other times it may be necessary to send a strong combat patrol to fight for information and to take prisoners. Planning in advance is an important factor in effective composition of patrols in as much as patrol members should have rest periods in advance of their assignments. Patrol leaders must be highly skilled leaders . . . The best time to hit the enemy lines is after nightfall, when the normal feeding schedule may disrupt security and provide noises which may divulge numbers. The same is true to a lesser extent before daylight, as the enemy will be inclined to be dulled by sleep, although a daylight return to one's own lines may represent difficulties. Enemy work parties will generally get under way shortly after darkness and are not particularly quiet. The best time for a deep penetration of enemy lines by patrol is about two hours before daybreak, as this is undoubtedly the time of lowest alertness and, generally, work parties will have slackened or ceased. We must not hesitate to send a hide-out patrol which may spend the daylight hours in proximity to or behind the

enemy lines. This requires good discipline, particularly if friendly artillery is active, but it is possible and highly effective."

The taking of prisoners was often required of patrols, and it proved a difficult and dangerous task. Ambush of an enemy patrol was one method, but if the enemy had no patrols out in the area, the raid technique used often by the British 6th Royal West Kents Battalion was frequently successful. The patrol, of at least ten men, maneuvered into position, preferably near an enemy outguard or listening post located by one or two scouts while the remainder were inactive. Six men took up positions from which they could protect the others with tommy-gun or BAR fire. The remaining four crawled as close to the enemy position as possible and the leader signaled the rush by throwing a hand grenade. This group immediately converged on the enemy. The covering group took up fire three minutes after the first grenade burst, which generally gave sufficient time for success of the mission, or in any case assisted withdrawal of the raiding group.

Patrol action may have sounded dull to the casual, distant reader, but to the members the patrols were, more often than not, occasions for harrowing escapes from death. Many men, of course, never returned alive from patrol. Some assignments turned out to be no more than long periods of apprehension. Sometimes the night was filled with action. Often the patrol was a mixture of both.

The first prisoners taken by the 85th Division were captured as a result of action by a patrol from Company L, 339th Infantry, headed by Lt. Walter Moss. The patrol went out on the night of 10 April 1944 and, in a stiff fire fight near Highway 7 not far from the German positions in Scauri, captured three prisoners of war identified as being from the 10th Company, 274th Infantry. Not only were these the first prisoners captured by the Custer Division, but they were the first taken on the II Corps front in some time. The Division and the patrol members received much favorable comment for the aggressive action.

On another occasion, two privates were ordered out on a patrol to an outpost position where they were ordered to hold a house in no man's land for twenty-four hours. They were Pvts. Carl Larson of Everett, Massachusetts, and Isabel Barreras of Tucumcari, New Mexico. They were to take four other men with them. Larson and Barreras had learned from previous missions that it was very tiring and unexciting, lying on the ground, listening for the enemy, so they were not happy about assignment.

Taking tommy guns and a sound-powered telephone for summoning aid if necessary, the six soldiers crept out into the darkness and made their way to the designated house. They stood guard all night, but not

a German appeared. About daybreak they sprang to an alert when they heard the sound of many feet running toward the building. The peered out of windows ready to shoot at the sight of a German uniform. They had been unnecessarily alarmed, however, for the men turned out to be a lieutenant with twelve of his men from their own company, returning from a patrol during which they had captured three Germans. The lieutenant, who knew they were there, greeted them and the patrol passed on back toward the American lines. Larson and Barreras and their men settled back to resume their watch. They had hardly done so when they heard more sounds of feet approaching their position. They ran quickly out of the house and looked cautiously around the corner of the building. About two hundred yards or so away from them was a group of about thirty Germans coming toward the farmhouse. Apparently the enemy was moving out there to take over the very same house they were occupying. Larson acted quickly. He knew he and the other five had little chance against thirty of the enemy. He told Barreras and two of the others to cover one side of the house. He and another man covered the other side, while another man, to whom he called inside the building, called up the artillery on the sound-powered phone and ordered a barrage. This was quick thinking and took great courage, for any artillery shells that landed short would greatly endanger their lives.

In no time at all, it seemed, the 910th Field Artillery Battalion had shells on the way—shells which came crashing down on the Germans less than 150 yards from the Custermen. The Germans retreated quickly, taking their wounded and dead with them. Barreras, however, was hit by a shell fragment and wounded.

The 328th Field Artillery Battalion had now joined the other battalions of Division Artillery in direct support of the front-line positions. The 337th Infantry began infiltrating units into the center sector of the II Corps front preparatory to taking over that sector. The 338th Infantry now moved north from Qualiano into the area being vacated by the 337th. At 0200 hours on 14 April the 337th completed the relief of the 351st Infantry of the 88th Division and, at that hour, control of this sector also passed to the Commanding General, 85th Division. The Division was now covering a front 9,500 yards wide, extending from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Ausente River. The 339th continued to hold its sector and with the 337th Infantry, now in line with three battalions abreast, the Division front had six battalions on line.

German forces opposing the newly acquired sector were known to include the 194th Fusilier Battalion and one company of the 274th

Infantry in the vicinity of Santa Maria and Pulcherini; and the 2d Battalion, 211th Infantry (71st Division), on the high ground west of the Ausente River. The boundary between the 94th and 71st Divisions was believed to be generally in the low ground just east of Pulcherini.

During this period of active defense and preparation for major offensive action, General Coulter and his staff, particularly Lt.Col. McDonald, his G-2, were studying information about the enemy gathered by patrols which were sent out each night by front-line rifle companies. With the passage of time and through the daring and courage of the patrol members, a great mass of detail was built up to give a reasonably complete picture of the enemy dispositions. An attempt was made by the use of patrols and aerial photos to pinpoint the locations of all gun and mortar positions along the front line. It was learned that the enemy had based most of his defenses along the reverse slopes, that he relied mainly on extensive use of land and personnel mines and well coordinated, interlocking bands of machine-gun fire supported by mortars and artillery to hold his positions. Information was also obtained that his artillery was located generally around Spigno, Castellonorato, Maranola, and Formia; that some *Nebelwerfers* were on the reverse slopes of Mount Scauri; that his 170mm guns and the coast-defense guns at Gaeta were capable of reaching any of our installations north of Mount Massico.

Much information was obtained also from civilian refugees who travelled in small boats from behind the enemy lines in the vicinity of Formia and Gaeta and landed along the coast in the Division sector. They were apprehended by the alert 85th Reconnaissance Troop which picked up, also in the same area during this period, four enemy agents using similar means of transportation.

Both sides were jockeying for advantages, seeking information about each other's positions and plans, and attempting to inflict the maximum amount of destruction on personnel and equipment possible in a stabilized line. The Germans had two weapons which were highly unpopular with the Custermen. They were the machine pistol and the *Nebelwerfer.* The former was used extensively by the Germans on patrol almost as much to frighten their opponents as to kill them. It had an extremely rapid rate of fire and made a long, demoralizing *brrrrrrrrrt* sound something like the exhaust of a motorcycle. Many Germans, it was learned, used it like a garden hose. They entrenched themselves in some deep, secure hole and, raising the muzzle over the edge and pointing it in the direction of the 85th, generously sprayed the area to their front without aiming at anything specific. From the other end, however, dur-

ing the night when the Custer patrols were sneaking around in no man's land, it sounded as though the Germans meant business and could almost see everything that went on. Often the Germans moved about with the weapon, firing it from different locations, for purposes of confusion. One fairly quiet night, after the early adoption of a policy of firing five shells for each one of the enemy's, Lt. Rufus E. Hallmark, commander of the 339th's Cannon Company, had a battery of his guns chasing a German operating a machine (squirt) pistol all over the area to his immediate front for about two hours. Hallmark claimed "mission accomplished" when, after two hours, the German was no longer heard. Hallmark was constantly competing with Capt. Leroy Monsky, commander of the 338th's Infantry's Cannon Company, for honors in the accuracy of the firing of their respective gunners. Monsky once claimed that a battery of his guns struck down a German motorcycle messenger. Monsky's cannoneers had been laying for him after watching him roar down Highway 7 in broad daylight toward the 85th Division lines and then swerve off up a side road to the north. Monsky declared that his men had timed the messenger several days in succession in his daily run and had calculated their firing data so that their shells would arrive at the intersection the same time the messenger did. According to Monsky it worked, and the event made the front page of the Army's newspaper, *Stars and Stripes.* Hallmark, however, saw nothing unusual in that bit of firing and countered with his own story of the early morning interruption of three Germans' preparations for shaving near the brick factory in the town of Scauri. He had many numbered targets which he fired whenever he received a call. Knowing that the Germans were frequently active around the brick factory early in the morning he had one gun laid for direct fire on the northeast corner of the factory. Shortly after daylight one morning, an officer called him on the telephone to report that an observer in an OP had spotted three Germans near the outside of this same corner preparing to shave. Hallmark immediately had the gunner fire one round—a direct hit on the corner of the factory. The observer reported that one of the Germans appeared to have been killed, another hobbled away wounded, while the third apparently escaped.

During this static period, the enemy artillery maintained harassing and nuisance fire with occasional concentrations on any profitable targets. His normal targets were the 85th's front-line positions—Minturno, Tufo, Tremensuoli, the Minturno bridge, and the coastal area where the supporting Corps artillery was located. The Custer Division's artillery was more powerful and most effective. It now could be seen that the long months of intensive training were bearing fruit.

The 85th Division's artillery demonstrated day after day, and night after night, that it could deliver, swiftly and accurately, a heavy volume of fire on enemy positions, supply dumps and supply routes. The policy of returning five shells for each of the enemy's kept the Germans almost completely under cover during daylight. No enemy troops or supplies were moved except at night and the interdictory fire and quick concentrations at critical points of the enemy supply lines unquestionably caused many enemy casualties. Effective counterbattery fire by the 403d Field Artillery Battalion and the use of the artillery liaison planes limited greatly the enemy artillery fire during daylight.

When the 85th Division Artillery did lose a gun through enemy action, it was found that resupply of damaged equipment was prompt. On one occasion, when a 155mm gun of the 403d FA Battalion was destroyed by a direct hit, a new gun was delivered in three hours.

The month of April was drawing to a close. On 24 April the 338th Infantry relieved the 339th Infantry in the coastal sector, thus permitting the 339th to get a much needed rest in the rear area. On 26 April the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion was attached to the Division, and by 0800 hours on 28 April six tank destroyers of this unit were in position in direct support of the 338th Infantry sector.

As the weeks of the month of April 1944 passed, the warm Italian sun had become warmer. Every day it pursued its course in clear or lightly clouded skies. The air was warm, lazy, springlike; and spring was well on its way toward summer. Everywhere were budding olive groves and orchards laden with oranges and hillsides covered with waking vineyards. Spring is life, but as soldiers picked their way through the groves or vineyards or through narrow trails in the orchards, now cleared of mines, this spring seemed to be a mockery. For, each day and each night, life was being matched with death. Young men, who had lived no longer than the springs of their own lives, had already been brought to a sudden and violent end. And the war was still young. As yet the Allied armies had no more than a foothold in Europe. At the end of April 1944, the lines of the Red Army were but a short distance into eastern Poland and northeastern Rumania. The Germans were still resisting powerfully in Italy—the Southern Front. There was no Western Front. For a long time the campaign in Italy had progressed slowly. For one thing, the Germans had moved large forces into the country of their former ally and member of the Axis. They appeared to be ready to contest every foot of the Italian peninsula. The Allied task was not merely to dislodge a competent, mature, well equipped enemy; Allied troops had to attack him in constantly rainy, muddy

weather and over towering, precipitous mountains the like of which most of them had never before beheld. Italian battlefields, from the toe of the boot to the Po Valley, were in mountains. Here was no flat country suitable for the dashing sweep of aggressive armored units. This was country for mountain troops and mules.

The time had come for a change, however. Great events were in the making. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had publicly announced to Allies and enemy alike: "We shall mount the struggle in Italy as fast as troops and supplies can be transported across the Mediterranean." In swift fulfillment of his promise, for two months now giant convoys had been converging on Naples from both ends of the Mediterranean. The Custermen had watched them day after day from the high hills east of Oran, before the Division had ever come to Italy. Through field glasses they had watched the hundreds of ships stretching out toward the distant horizon move eastward along the North Africa coastline. From the eastern end of the Mediterranean, from Alexandria in Egypt, came huge convoys bearing troops and supplies, including oil from the Middle East. Into Italy, through the port of Naples, poured vast supplies of food for the Allied armies and ammunition for Allied guns. Long convoys of tanks, trucks, and heavy guns headed north out of Naples in thick clouds of dust toward the front lines. Out of the holds of hundreds of ships poured men—men to swell the ranks of the badly depleted Fifth and Eighth Armies, men to give great power and strength to the new Italian Campaign in the making. These men came not from one nation, but from many. Italy was the melting pot of the United Nations. And now into the Fifth and Eighth Armies went Americans of the 88th and 85th Divisions of the Army of the United States, Frenchmen of the French Expeditionary Corps, Britishers from the armies in the Middle East, fighting men from India, Moroccans and Algerians from North Africa, and many more.

But the addition of troops and supplies was not deemed sufficient. The plans were big. The coming offensive was to be on a gigantic scale. The top commanders felt that an entire realignment of the Allied armies in Italy was necessary. Accordingly, in an amazingly successful deception, the entire weight of the Fifth and Eighth Armies was shifted to the left of the line. The Eighth Army front was extended to the western side of Italy and took over that part of the Fifth Army's sector northeast of the Liri River. This gave the British the Liri Valley and Cassino in their zone.

The Fifth Army was to operate south of the Liri River and in the course of its advance was to facilitate the progress of the Eighth Army by securing the high ground south of the Liri.

Considerable pains were taken to conceal movements and concentrations while the two armies moved into their respective areas. Troop movements, radio activity, concentrations, and amphibious and paratroop demonstrations were conducted to mislead and confuse the enemy. These measures were largely successful, for enemy documents captured later during the attack disclosed that the Germans had inaccurate information concerning the composition and dispositions of Fifth Army troops. The amphibious demonstrations led them to believe that such an operation was planned and influenced them to place their reserves where they were later canalized as the advance progressed.

On the main front the British 5 Corps, under control of AAI (Allied Armies in Italy) was ordered to hold and exert pressure on the extreme right flank. (Throughout this narrative, British corps are designated by arabic figures; U.S. corps by Roman numerals.) The sector of 5 Corps began at a point northeast of Cassino and ran all the way across the rest of Italy to the Adriatic Sea, the main bulk of the Fifth and Eighth Armies being concentrated on the left flank. The main effort for the entire offensive was to be made by Eighth Army, which was ordered to break through the enemy's positions into the Liri Valley and advance on the general axis of Highway 6. The initial attack was to be made with 10 Corps on the right, the Polish Corps in the center, and 13 Corps on the left. Covering a wide front, 10 Corps was to show force and lead the enemy to believe it would attack toward Atina. The Polish Corps' assignment was to outflank the Monastery, cut Highway 6 and, after seizure of the Monastery, attack in the direction of Piedimonte. A rapid advance would then be pressed to secure all the high ground toward Roccasecca. This action would assist 13 Corps, whose plan was to force a crossing of the Rapido River and move swiftly up the Liri Valley. The Canadian 1 Corps, in Eighth Army reserve, was to be used either to assist or to pass through 13 Corps, depending on the situation.

Artillery missions were initially to be counterbattery and concentrations on known positions, later shifting to maintain roadblocks at critical points to isolate the battlefield and to disrupt the enemy's means of supply, communications and reinforcement.

The Navy was assigned a similar mission in the Terracina area along the coastal flank of II Corps.

The Air Forces were ordered to isolate the battlefield and to attack enemy communications west of Rome.

Fifth Army's assignment was to capture the Ausonia defile and advance on the axis generally parallel to that of Eighth Army but south of the Liri and Sacco Rivers. The rest of General Clark's men were to break out of the Anzio Beachhead on the general axis Cori–Valmontone

to cut Highway 6 in the Valmontone area and thereby prevent the supply and withdrawal of troops of the German Tenth Army opposing the advance of Fifth and Eighth Armies. The Fifth Army attack from the beachhead would be ready to be launched on twenty-four hours' notice any time after D plus 4. After consolidation of the united forces, the enemy was to be pursued north of Rome, and the Viterbo airfields and the port of Civitavecchia were to be captured. The advance would then proceed on to Leghorn.

In order to assist the main effort of Eighth Army north of the Liri and Sacco Rivers, Fifth Army's main effort had to be made on its right. There had been no mention at all of an advance along Highway 7. General Clark decided to attack on his right, seizing Sant' Ambrogio, and at the same time taking the high ground west of the Minturno bridgehead. This would give him control of the Ausente Valley from which he could push on through the Petrella hill mass to cut the Itri–Pico road and smash the Hitler Line which lay beyond the Gustav Line.

Fifth Army forces, which included the Anzio Beachhead, were considerable. The main front troops were under control of II Corps and the French Expeditionary Corps. II Corps was made up of the U.S. 85th and 88th Infantry Divisions, while the FEC consisted of the French 1st Motorized Infantry Division, 2d Moroccan Infantry Division, 3d Algerian Infantry Division, and 4th Moroccan Mountain Division. In addition, FEC had three groups of *Goumiers* (Goums).

The Beachhead forces, under VI Corps, consisted of the U.S. 3d, 34th and 45th Infantry Divisions, the British 1st and 5th Infantry Divisions, the U.S. 1st Armored Division, and the 1st Special Service Force (Canadians-Americans).

The U.S. 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, located in the Naples area, was to be prepared to execute drop missions on army order.

Fifth Army's reserve was the U.S. 36th Infantry Division, attached to II Corps for possible employment in the II Corps zone. This division was also to be prepared for a rapid movement to the Anzio Beachhead.

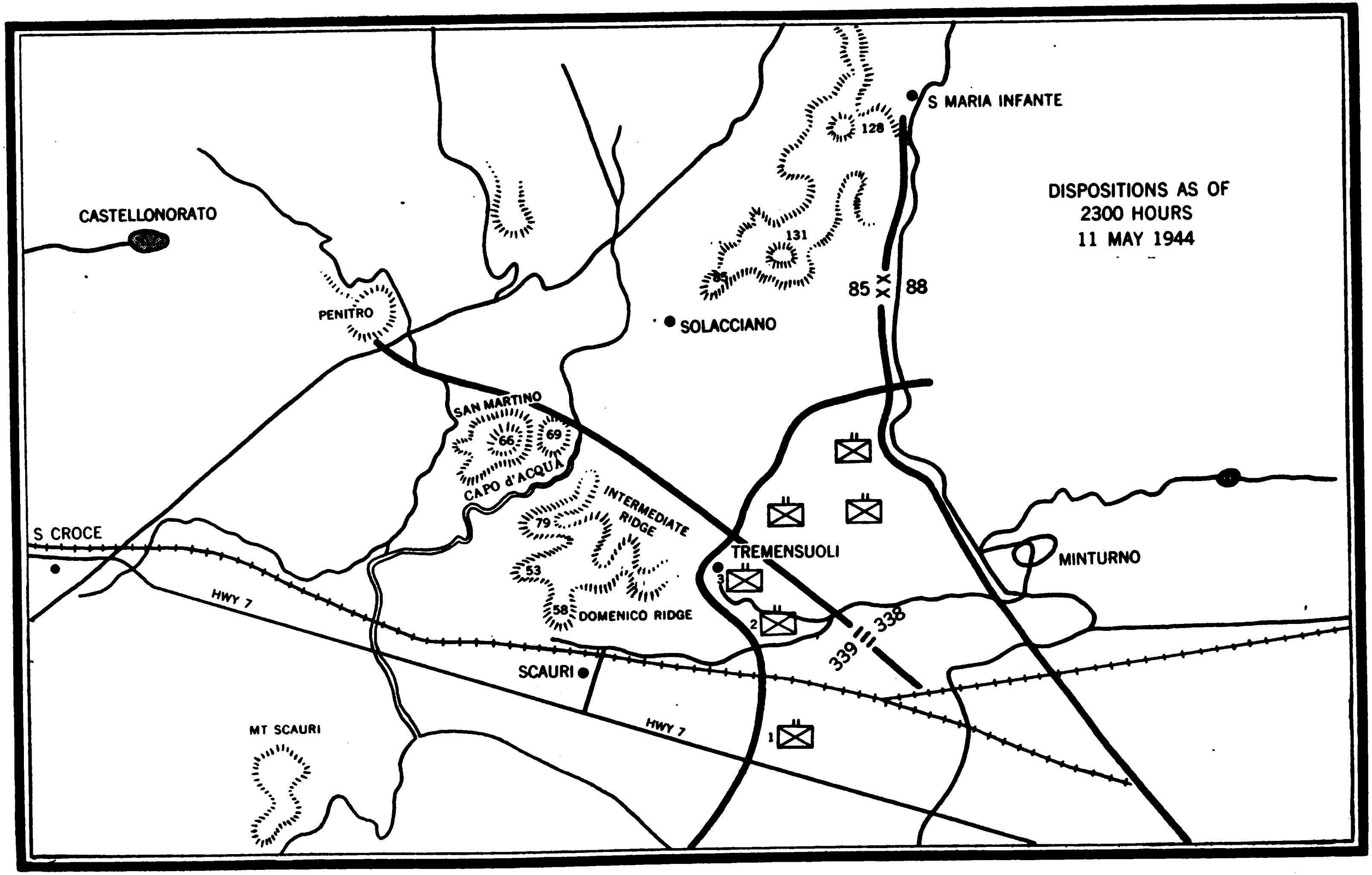
Upon receipt of orders for the attack, General Coulter, 85th Division commander, made thorough and detailed plans and final preparations for the employment of the various organic and attached units of the Division. The 339th Infantry left the Division rest area south of Mount Massico and took over approximately the left half of the 338th Infantry sector. The 338th remained in line but moved part of its units to the right so that it now was defending in what amounted to half of its former zone. Each regiment had two battalions abreast on the front line. This was a great increase in power, for there were now two regiments,

each with two battalions in line, in the same zone where one regiment had defended with three battalions in line. The 337th Infantry was relieved in its sector by the 88th Division and became the 85th Division's reserve with positions southwest of Tremensuoli. One battalion of the 337th was attached to the 339th Infantry in the left front-line sector. By 9 May 1944 the 85th Division CP had been moved to Minturno.

The whole atmosphere at the front was now extremely tense. Everyone knew that a tremendous offensive had been ordered and that D-day was very near. For weeks huge supplies of food, equipment, and ammunition had been brought up to the forward area. The troops noticed that for added power they had been packed into sectors much more narrow than was normal. Living conditions were far more crowded than postwar housing turned out to be. Most men were living in some kind of Italian farmhouse, with anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five sleeping on the floor in one room. Many, however, were also dug into the ground and sandbagged for protection in natural or hand-fashioned caves and hillside "igloos." It seemed that all the enemy had to do was fire one shell at random into the Division area and he would be sure to inflict casualties.

In their free time the men wrote many letters home. They knew they were about to engage in an important and highly dangerous adventure. As it turned out, of course, many of them were writing their last words to their families, wives or sweethearts. It was painful to see so much of what was going on and to be unable to mention word of it. But in his own way, by generalization, each man tried to reassure his loved ones in the United States that he was all right and expected to "get through this thing OK."

As the Custermen waited for the big day to come, they read in *Stars and Stripes* of informal conferences going on in London among the Prime Ministers of Great Britain, Canada, Union of South Africa, and Australia. The purpose was to conduct a foreign-policy conference in close consultation with British Foreign Secretary Sir Anthony Eden. The highest priority was being given to the treatment of Germany after the surrender of the German armies to the Allies. All felt that Germany would have to remain under United Nations military control for a long time. How would the areas of occupation be determined among the United Nations? What would be done to Germany and her satellite nations—Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria? What of the liberation of occupied territories and the new political movements that had sprung up in Greece, Yugoslavia, France, and others, as a result of Underground activities? What of European economic and social problems? What of



Map 2: *The Gustav Line: Before the Breakthrough.* (Scale 1:53,000)

the rehabilitation of European industry and agriculture? These were some of the knotty and difficult questions of postwar foreign policy being discussed in London. Somehow, as soldiers faced a major battle with the Germans, it was encouraging to reflect that plans were being made to deal with the enemy after his surrender. It fostered an air of confidence, a feeling that this fight, although it would certainly be hard, would definitely be won. It is safe to say that the thought of being defeated or even of being checked in the offensive that was now about to be launched never entered the mind of a single member of the Custer Division. The whole attitude was completely the opposite. Everyone was confident. The Division had undergone tough training for almost two years in all kinds of climate and in all types of terrain. It had been tested in battle and was sure of itself. Now was the time to show its true worth and ability in major offensive action against a stubborn and skillful enemy. It was a chance to inflict upon the enemy a significant, fierce, and powerful blow—one that would help to bring him ultimately to his knees in utter surrender. The chief interest was to get the whole thing over with and go home. If this great offensive would help to accomplish that, and the signs of military power everywhere behind the Division lines suggested that it would, all were in favor of it.

There was no moon on the night of 11 May 1944. What few stars could be seen were straining through the mist of the upper atmosphere. It was 2255 hours. Along the entire length of the Fifth and Eighth Army lines, from Cassino to the Tyrrhenian Sea, thousands of Allied soldiers lay tense in the darkness waiting for the moment of attack. The last five minutes were an eternity. At last, promptly at 2300 hours, the great offensive began. Precisely at that moment began the tremendous half-hour artillery barrage which preceded the advance of the infantry. Twelve field artillery battalions supported the Division either directly or indirectly. These varied from the 75mm howitzers of the 602d Field Artillery (Pack) Battalion to the 155mm Long Toms and the 240mm howitzers of II Corps Artillery. Simultaneously, all these guns began firing their concentrations, and the surrounding country was illuminated with the flash of bursting shells in the greatest barrage of World War II up to then.

Quietly, tensely, and resolutely, through the darkness and under cover of this smashing barrage, the forward infantry troops of the 85th Division had moved up into jumpoff positions where they waited, grim and alert, for the time of assault. At last it came. Supported by their own machine-gun, mortar, and cannon company fire, the troops advanced toward the German positions. Ahead of them lay mines, machine guns, miles of mountainous terrain, fortifications, heavy guns, a

resolute and skillful enemy; ahead of them lay one of the fiercest battles fought in any theater in World War II.

The Germans were deceived, but only to the extent that the Fifth Army attack effected tactical surprise. The enemy had been expecting an attack, but not at this date. His reaction to the offensive, however, was prompt and vicious. He had been preparing his front-line positions for some time, siting his machine guns, zeroing his mortars, digging deeper emplacements for all his artillery, even pouring concrete for his bunkers and pillboxes. Now from these meticulously prepared positions he laid down a continuous defensive band of machine-gun fire. His mortar and artillery fire began falling on forward positions of the Custer Division. The advance outposts in Tremensuoli were subjected to exceptionally heavy enemy artillery concentrations. There was no doubt that the enemy would not easily surrender his positions. The 85th had been well trained and had been battle-tested in a stabilized line, but this was something it had never before encountered. Now it was necessary for it to move forward over open ground in the face of fierce fire from all of the enemy's many weapons.

On the left of the Division sector, the 339th Infantry, advancing toward Hill 79 and San Martino, which was made up of two peaks, Hills 66 and 69, encountered determined resistance. The ground in front of the German positions was heavily mined and the Polar Bear Regiment began to suffer many casualties. Pfc. Anthony Tozzo, Company M, was one of the first to die. The 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, en route toward their objective on San Martino, ran into an unexpectedly tough obstacle in their efforts to cross Capo d'Acqua, a small stream with very steep banks. Here they encountered minefields, barbed wire, mortar and enfilade machine-gun fire.

On the right of the Division sector, the 338th Infantry, advancing toward Solacciano Ridge, ran into heavy fire from thick-walled houses which the enemy had fortified. In order to approach these houses, men had to work their way through very dense minefields. Troops of Company I, 338th Infantry, managed to drive the Germans from one of these houses after a sharp fight. They then called for artillery fire and lay watching while the artillery levelled the neighboring house. Swiftly, and with the teamwork born of months of training and association together, I Company took over the enemy's fortified positions in time to meet the German reinforcements sent to recapture the houses.

Company A, 338th Infantry, attacked vigorously, moving up a steep draw. The enemy, however, was alert and opened fire with the full blast of his machine guns carefully placed to fire down the draw so as to inflict the maximum number of casualties. Man after man fell dead

or wounded until Company A was able to maneuver a platoon that could close in on the enemy and destroy him with hand grenades.

The battle had now been joined, desperately. The 85th discovered that it was up against the enemy's main line of resistance (MLR) and that he was contesting every inch of ground and counterattacking viciously to regain whatever the Custermen forced him to relinquish. The fight was rapidly growing into a tremendous knock-down, drag-out struggle of life or death. The winner would be the one who could bring to bear the most fire power, the greater accuracy in marksmanship, the greater resourcefulness, the greater determination. In the pitch blackness of the night, pierced by the burst of shells and the whining red streaks of the tracers, in a night that measured a hundred years for each minute that passed, the opponents fought on—the German 94th and the U.S. 85th Divisions.

On the extreme coastal flank, Company A, 339th Infantry, commanded by Capt. John J. Brennan of San Diego, California, advanced steadily through thick minefields and medium opposition to its objective at the edge of the coastal town of Scauri. Lieutenant O'Brien was killed by mines which caused twenty other casualties.

Company C, however, commanded by Captain Neidhart, ran into a peck of trouble. Neidhart sent his 2d Platoon, under Lieutenant Buckley, to take the right half of Domenico Ridge, considered a single mass, although it was split by a draw. Buckley reported by radio that he had moved out on time. This was the last report to come in from Company C for hours. In the first heavy return barrage, the enemy destroyed the wire lines and the company radio went suddenly dead. Wire parties went out feeling their way through the darkness and the shelling toward Domenico, but the artillery fire was so intense that their wires were shot out behind them before they could make contact. Again and again Sergeant Pettit and his men went out, but contact was not established until Staff Sergeant McCarty, the battalion's intelligence sergeant, loaded a spare radio on his back and went forward to make the desired contact. It was only after several days that the picture of what happened became clear. Lieutenant Buckley had moved out with his men, reporting regularly on his SCR-536 radio. However, he soon ran into mines, artillery, and small-arms fire. The casualties were heavy, but he pushed on in spite of them. The shelling was so heavy that the men became separated and confused in the darkness. Lieutenant Buckley, with the remaining men whom he could locate, pushed on. At 0200 hours on the morning of 12 May he reported in: "We have reached our objective. Eight men left. Are digging in under fire." A short while later he radioed: "We are being counterattacked." There was silence, but only for a short time.

He called again: "We are surrounded. We shall hold out until reinforcements reach us. We can make no contact with the forces on our right." This was the last word from Buckley. But he held his ground and with his handful of men about him, refused to surrender. When the hill was taken, two days later, he and six of his men were found there—dead. Two bodies were not found.

As each minute went by, the fighting became more fierce. The enemy had the advantage of remaining in position, in comparative security, since he was defending. The Custermen had to attack over open ground, through minefields, and under a rain of mortar, artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire in order to get at the enemy and pry him loose from his strongholds. It was grim, dirty business, and the hand of death was heavy everywhere.

The 3d Platoon of Company C, 339th, under command of Lieutenant Aitken, drove forward against the Germans on the company's left toward the seaward nose of Domenico. Before they had gone far, they ran into mines and mortar fire and were sprayed with heavy fire from emplaced machine guns. Lieutenant Aitken had one leg almost torn off by a mortar shell, but he propped himself up in a sitting position and continued to direct his men. He protested violently as aid men finally carried him away. He died at the aid station. The next man in command of the platoon, Technical Sergeant Joel, the platoon sergeant, took over at once and led his men forward to close combat with one of the machine-gun nests. In the fight that followed Joel was killed by a hand grenade and the platoon was by now so hard hit with casualties that it was forced to withdraw and reorganize.

Company C's Weapons Platoon, meanwhile, had come under very heavy artillery fire laid down by the enemy to keep back reserves. The platoon was badly scattered and the platoon leader, Lieutenant Sammons, was injured. The remaining mortar squads pulled back to avoid the murderous concentrations. Technical Sergeant Herman, the Weapons Platoon sergeant, moved his light machine guns forward to assist the advance, but artillery fire destroyed all of one squad of men, smashing the gun. He, too, was forced to withdraw.

The enemy evidently considered the zone of Company C's advance to be vital to his defense, for he threw all he had into repelling the attacks. By now Company C had become so decimated that it was forced to withdraw, just before dawn, to its original take-off position. Over sixty per cent of the company's men were missing. At daylight, the remaining elements of Company B passed through the defensive position now held by C, and advanced a short distance. However, enemy artillery fire was still smashing into the hillside so the men dug in for

protection. But even after they had dug themselves into the ground, Lieutenant Young, a platoon leader, and several enlisted men were killed in their foxholes by the heavy concentration.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles C. Isely, commanding the 1st Battalion of the 339th, now moved up elements of the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which were under his direct control. They blasted the installations on Domenico that had proved impervious to artillery fire. A day later Company B assaulted the hill and was successful in taking it. Almost at the same time Company A took over the town of Scauri. Company C's trials, however, were not over. On 15 May, strengthened by inexperienced replacements, the company, with only two officers, stormed Hill 58 and again ran into widespread minefields and heavy artillery fire. The new men, who had just been assigned to the Division from replacement pools and sent into action amid this scene of hell, were untried and frightened, and failed to follow Lieutenant Hollins as he led the attack toward the top of the hill. Hollins reached the top with two men. Immediately one of these men was badly wounded and the other was instantly killed. Hollins, however, would not retreat. Unaided, he destroyed one of the three machine-gun nests on the hill before he himself was wounded and knocked unconscious by a mortar shell. When he regained consciousness, he returned to his lines, bringing the wounded man with him. For his aggressiveness and leadership Lieutenant Hollins was awarded the Silver Star. The enemy, too, had been roughly treated, for the remainder of the Nazi forces on the hill withdrew that night and the battle for that sector ended.

The 2d Battalion, 339th Infantry, commanded by Lt.Col. Charles F. Mudgett, also ran into heavy resistance. Company G, however, provided great inspiration by a swift and courageous attack on its objective. Following closely in the wake of the great artillery barrage that opened the offensive, the 1st Platoon moved down the slopes of Hill 79, proceeded west along the Capo d'Acqua and fought its way up the reverse slope of Hill 79 at its extremity. They met fierce resistance and suffered heavy casualties from mines and the enemy's final protective line fires. But, under the leadership of Lieutenant Waugh, the platoon took its objective. They had already seized a large part of the objective before the tremendous artillery barrage ceased falling. The 2d Platoon, following a similar procedure, also encountered determined resistance and suffered heavy casualties. This platoon too seized most of its objective while American artillery was still pounding it. Hill 79 was a vital terrain feature, and the enemy was stunned by its swift capture.

The 3d Platoon of Company G ran into thickly sown minefields

and murderous final protective line machine-gun fire. The platoon was practically destroyed and its surviving members were forced to withdraw. The 1st and 2d Platoons, however, once they had seized their strategic objective, would not give it up. The Distinguished Unit Citation, later awarded to this company by War Department General Orders No. 81, dated 14 October 1944 describes the scene:

"Company G, 339th Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action from 11 to 14 May 1944 near Tremensuoli, Italy. Company G was assigned the mission of wresting from a determined enemy a hill which was the key terrain feature of the left flank of the German Gustav Line. Taking advantage of the preparatory artillery barrage, the company moved into the attack and seized a large portion of the objective before the barrage ceased falling. The two assault platoons, closing rapidly with the enemy before he could recover, killed 60 and captured 40 of the defenders, demolished 8 bunkers, reduced 7 pillboxes and captured 25 automatic weapons. The objective taken, Company G immediately emplaced and employed captured enemy weapons to assist the assaults of adjacent companies on two nearby hills and an intermediate ridge. After the enemy recovered from his initial confusion, Company G positions were pounded incessantly for 48 hours by artillery and mortar fire and were subjected to three determined counterattacks. The company suffered heavy casualties, and because of its isolated positions went without food or water for over 36 hours. With heroic determination, the infantrymen of this company held every inch of the ground gained. The fighting aggressiveness, courage, and devotion to duty displayed by members of Company G are worthy of emulation and reflect honor upon the armed forces of the United States."

It was teamwork and the brave deeds of individuals that won this award for Company G. Staff Sgt. James W. Brady was one of the individuals. He was awarded the Silver Star for his work. During the initial assault upon the enemy's well fortified line, he led an automatic-rifle team of three men against an enemy pillbox. When one of the riflemen was hit by enemy machine-gun fire, Brady took up the weapon, advanced upon the position under heavy fire. A weaker man would have fallen back or sought protection for himself, but Brady went on and killed eight German soldiers and forced three others to surrender. Then, although wounded, he remained in command to lead his men courageously and effectively through a day of intense and bitter conflict that followed.

Private First Class Michael J. Derbas, also of Company G, was another whose desire to close with the enemy earned him the Silver Star.

His platoon had been held up in its assault upon the strongly defended enemy hill positions by hostile machine-gun fire. After locating the gun, Derbas, lead scout for his platoon, courageously moved through a minefield under cover of automatic rifle fire to a position from which he could attack the emplacement. Reaching a position within close range, he threw two hand grenades into the emplacement, killing two of the gun crew, capturing the third, and neutralizing the weapon. This fearless act, which eliminated a serious threat to the safety of his platoon, aided Company G in the advance to its objective.

Company G's commander, Capt. Felix V. Mercado of Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, was the prime mover in the company's magnificent attack. From the very start he was out forward with the troops, leading two platoons through enemy minefields and heavy hostile fire. After twenty-eight prisoners had been captured and forty of the enemy killed, Mercado, although nearly surrounded by strong enemy forces and suffering heavy casualties among his men, reorganized the assault platoon to defend the newly won positions. Over a three-day period and largely through his inspiration, the company was able to repel numerous heavy counterattacks. Captain Mercado also was awarded the Silver Star.

Still another Silver Star went to Pfc. Edward J. Burns of San Francisco. Burns was an ordinary rifleman, but when the automatic-rifle team of his platoon suffered heavy casualties from the fire of an enemy machine-gun nest as it moved forward during the attack, he picked up one of the BARs and went to work. He wormed his way forward seventy-five yards through a minefield to a flank position and silenced the hostile weapon with a deadly and accurate burst of fire. As the platoon pressed on in the face of fanatical opposition, Burns again exposed himself to the heavy fire of the enemy machine guns to kill two enemy riflemen attempting to harass the advancing forces.

These were all significant acts of courage, but the work of Lt. Robert T. Waugh, of G Company, topped them all. Waugh was the Division's first recipient of the Medal of Honor. (Two other Custermen received this award in later actions.) War Department General Orders No. 79, dated 4 October 1944, gives the following citation for the award:

"First Lieutenant Robert T. Waugh, O-1302070, Infantry, United States Army. For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy from 11 to 14 May 1944 at Tremensuoli, Italy. In the course of an attack upon an enemy-held hill on 11 May, Lieutenant Waugh personally reconnoitered a heavily mined area before entering it with his platoon. Directing his men to deliver fire on six bunkers guarding this hill, Lieu-

tenant Waugh advanced alone against them, reached the first bunker, threw phosphorus grenades into it and as the defenders emerged killed them with a burst from his tommy gun. He repeated this process on the five remaining bunkers, killing or capturing the occupants. On the morning of 14 May, Lieutenant Waugh ordered his platoon to lay a base of fire on two enemy pillboxes located on a knoll which commanded the only trail up the hill. He then ran to the first pillbox, threw several grenades into it, drove the defenders into the open and killed them. The second pillbox was next taken by this intrepid officer by similar methods. The fearless actions of Lieutenant Waugh broke the Gustav Line at that point, neutralized six bunkers and two pillboxes, and he was personally responsible for the death of thirty of the enemy and the capture of twenty-five others. He was later killed in action at Itri, Italy, while leading his platoon in an attack."

The deeds of Lieutenant Waugh in this offensive became swiftly known through the 339th's regimental grapevine, and he was widely acclaimed. News of his latest exploit spread like wildfire throughout the regiment and acted as a tonic to tired men everywhere.

Meanwhile, Companies E and F of the 339th were fighting desperately. One platoon of F Company followed the reverse slope of Intermediate Ridge. These men encountered S mines and unsuspected enemy pillboxes. Men fell, dead and wounded. The rest fought their way to the top of the ridge, where they destroyed and displaced the enemy in a sharp fight. Casualties were now so high, however, and the enemy fire from Hills 53 and 58 was so intense, that they were forced to halt and take cover in the newly won enemy positions.

The rest of F Company, its 2d and 3d Platoons, was also hard hit as it hacked away at the enemy positions. Men followed the draws fronting on the forward slopes of Intermediate Ridge. Again they were laid low by S and stick mines, while machine-gun fire virtually destroyed one platoon. The company commander, Captain Angstreich, was seriously wounded and one of his officers, Lieutenant Martin, was killed. The remaining platoon was seriously disorganized by the intense enemy fire.

Company E also ran into mines and heavy machine-gun fire. They were pounded by the Germans from the latter's secure positions on Domenico Ridge and on Hill 58. One platoon was lost. The casualties from mines and machine-gun fire mounted. The company commander was wounded. So intense was the firing on both sides and, likewise, so heavy were the casualties on both sides, that at 0300 on 12 May less than one-third of Company E could be accounted for.

On one occasion, as Company E slogged its way forward, doggedly advancing under heavy artillery and mortar fire, it was held up by intense enemy machine-gun fire coming from a building to its right front. There seemed to be a good man in the 85th for every sticky situation that developed. This time it was Staff Sgt. Frank Bordovsky of LaGrange, Texas, who stepped forward—or, rather, crawled forward. Bordovsky continued to advance upon the emplacement in spite of the grave danger to his life involved in thus exposing himself. Aggressively moving up within range, he fired two rifle grenades into the building, killing two Germans and forcing the remainder to withdraw.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard S. Smith's 3d Battalion of the 339th started taking its casualties early. Ten minutes before the offensive began, a squad of Company L was destroyed by artillery as it was passing through Tremensuoli. As the advance continued along the trail from Tremensuoli to Hill 113 East, heavy artillery and mortar fire again struck Company L, destroying another squad. Company K, following Company L, also lost a squad and the platoon leaders of the 2d and 3d Platoons, Lieutenants Hanchette and Mooney, respectively. These officers were seriously wounded.

Finally, Company L reached the small stream with the steep sides, Capo d'Acqua. The 1st Squad was sent out as a point and the 2d Squad as a bridge-carrying detail. The latter squad carried four planks composed of two sets of two planks, eighteen feet long and twelve inches wide, nailed together. The planks were to be placed over the stream in two places, and the point squad was to cross over and protect them. Before they could get the bridges set up, both squads were destroyed by enemy mortar and machine-gun fire.

From Hill 113 East to Capo d'Acqua, the battalion was continually under fire and encountered minefields of stake and S mines. The trail was zeroed in by enemy artillery and mortar fire, and this withering destruction was supplemented by German machine guns which also fired on the columns from Hills 69 and 79.

The 2d Platoon of Company L crossed Capo d'Acqua by wading and swimming. On the eastern slope of Hill 69, their objective, they ran into a minefield and suffered several casualties. The platoon was able to secure the left half of the hill but could not take the right half. The mission of the 3d Platoon of Company L was to by-pass Hill 69 on the right and neutralize six enemy pillboxes on the northeast part of Hill 66. The platoon leader, along with several other men, was seriously wounded near Capo d'Acqua. Technical Sergeant Pavlick took

charge of the platoon and continued on the mission. They were successful in knocking out several pillboxes, but Sergeant Pavlick was killed. By 0300 on 12 May, Sgt. Walter Nowak, assistant squad leader, was the only noncommissioned officer left in the platoon. By then, too, Nowak had already distinguished himself in bitter fighting which won for him the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation, issued after he had been given a battlefield promotion to second lieutenant, reads:

"Walter J. Nowak, O-1692983, Second Lieutenant, Infantry. For extraordinary heroism in action, on the night of 11 May 1944, near Tremensuoli, Italy. When his platoon leader and platoon sergeant became casualties in an artillery and mortar barrage, Second Lieutenant Nowak (then Sergeant and assistant squad leader) assumed command of the platoon, rallied his men and continued the advance. After leading his men through a swiftly moving stream, he preceded the advance through a heavily mined area, probing with his bayonet for mines. While moving around the edge of a hill, the platoon encountered crossfire from three mutually supporting pillboxes situated on the objective. Ordering his men to engage the enemy in a fire fight, Second Lieutenant Nowak advanced up a bare slope to the first pillbox. Raising himself to the level of an embrasure, he threw several grenades into the position, killing its five defenders. Continuing his advance to the second and the third pillboxes, he repeated his tactics, killing thirteen Germans. Driving two other Germans into the open, he engaged them in a fierce bayonet fight and succeeded in killing them both. The courage, skill at arms, and able leadership displayed by Second Lieutenant Nowak were an inspiration to the entire platoon."

Much of the equipment of the 3d Battalion was lost in Capo d'Acqua. The stream was only fifteen feet wide and three and a half feet deep, but its banks were six feet high. What was more important, many men were killed there because the Germans had machine guns firing final protective lines covering the stream and their mortars were zeroed in to strike between its banks.

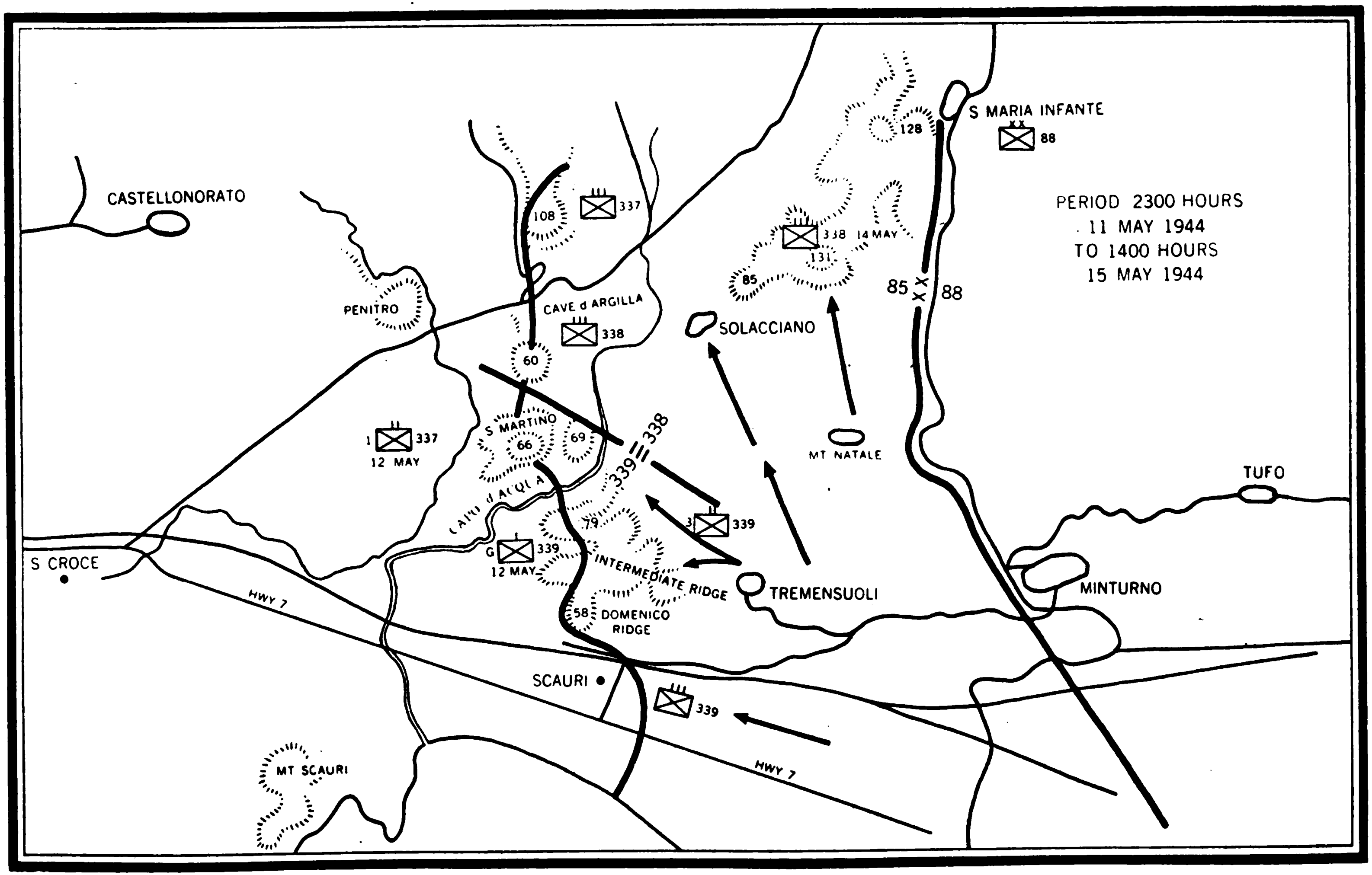
One of the most amazing demonstrations of physical energy, as well as devotion to duty, which took place at this time was the accomplishment of a heavy-weapons man, Pfc. Leo J. St.Onge, of Company M, 339th. St.Onge's company was supporting the attack of the 3d Battalion with machine-gun and mortar fire. Because of heavy casualties sustained by his machine-gun section, St.Onge carried 120 pounds of equipment, which included ammunition for his section's guns, across Capo d'Acqua and over extremely difficult terrain for approximately 3,500 yards to

reach his section's objective. During the crossing of the stream, he stopped long enough to save a member of his section who had become entangled in communication wires along the bank of the river and who was in danger of drowning. Although he was almost exhausted, he emplaced his machine gun in an exposed position under heavy and continuous enemy artillery, mortar, and automatic weapons fire. His gun was hit twice, but he continued to fire, and in so doing helped to repel numerous and bitter enemy counterattacks. When his gun was destroyed by a direct hit, St.Onge refused to count himself out of the fight. He borrowed a rifle from a wounded rifleman and continued to fight until his section was relieved that night. He was awarded the Silver Star.

About 2400, Company I, the reserve company, crossed Capo d'Acqua at the same point as Company L, and by 0100 some elements were on top of Hill 69. The 1st and 3d Platoons began their assault immediately on crossing the stream. Mines and artillery fire continued to take their toll. These two platoons moved forward swiftly to the forward slope of Hill 69 with one heavy machine-gun section of the 2d Platoon of Company M. The enemy struck back, however, and this section, one squad of the 3d Platoon, and one light machine-gun squad of Company I were captured. The 2d Platoon of Company I dug in on the rear slope of Hill 69.

By 0300, Company I had taken Hill 69 and Company K had proceeded on its mission of by-passing Hill 69 on the left and attacking the left half of Hill 66. The remainder of the 1st and 3d Platoons of Company K and the 1st Platoon of Company M were in position on Hill 66 by 0025. German gunners at Castellonorato and Mount Scauri were now firing on all positions on Hills 66 and 69. At 0430, Company K reported many pillboxes had been discovered on Hill 66 and were being dealt with one by one. At 0500 the Germans counterattacked Hill 66 in company strength, supported by tank fire, but they were unable to dislodge the Custermen.

When at full strength our World War II infantry rifle company had 187 men. Lt.Col. Smith now called for a report of effective strength at 0300. The reply was: Company I, 27; Company K, 29; Company L, 17. Smith scowled and sent an immediate request for reinforcements. His battalion did not have sufficient strength to continue the attack on Hill 66 or to withstand a strong counterattack. Colonel Brady immediately detached Company K, 337th Infantry, from his regimental reserve (the 3d Battalion), and ordered it to continue the assault on Hill 66, moving over the same route followed by the 3d Battalion, 339th. When they reached the base of Hill 69, the men



Map 3: *Three and a half days of fighting: The 85th smashes the Gustav Line. (Scale 1:53,000)*

of Company K, 337th Infantry, came under heavy artillery and mortar fire and they also suffered heavy mine casualties. The fight was still unmerciful in its fierceness, but by dawn Company K arrived on Hill 69 with only four officers and thirty-five enlisted men left. It was useless to attempt to continue the attack on Hill 66 with such a small force, so the remnants of Company K were ordered to reinforce the defenders of Hill 69.

The realization was now complete that the Division's objective was the enemy's main line of resistance rather than his outpost line. The situation was extremely grave. In Lt.Col. Smith's sector, only Hill 69 had been occupied and enemy counterattacks threatened at many points.

At 0700 Smith got in contact with the regimental commander, Colonel Brady, and informed him of the renewed need for more power. Brady at once requested additional reinforcements from General Coulter. By 1000 Smith received word that the 1st Battalion, 337th Infantry, advancing under a smoke screen, would pass through the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, on Hill 69 and proceed to take Hill 66. Fresh from Division reserve, calling on all the lessons it had learned in two years of training, and with the snap and punch of a new backfield with the ball on the opponents' 30-yard line, this battalion joined the fray full of fight. It fought its way forward against renewed concentrations of artillery and mortar fire. The Germans were stubborn. Two companies were finally halted by the volume of the enemy's fire and the casualties he was inflicting. Company C, however, refused to stop. It went on to engage the enemy and for its magnificent exploit was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation by War Department General Orders No. 81, dated 14 October 1944:

"Company C, 337th Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action from 12 to 16 May 1944, near Tremensuoli, Italy. Company C participated in a battalion attack on a strategically important hill which was a corps objective. Prior to this attack, another battalion attempted to take the objective, but suffered heavy casualties and was unable to hold the hill. Advancing through intense and concentrated artillery and mortar fire which halted two companies of the battalion, Company C relentlessly pressed forward and two platoons succeeded in reaching the crest of a hill in the route of advance toward the objective. Enemy artillery and mortar fire became more deadly and, in addition, small-arms fire was brought to bear on these two platoons. With the left flank of the company unsupported, it was necessary to spread out the few available men in order to continue the forward push. Reaching the crest after suffering heavy casualties, Company C was subjected to fierce enemy counterattacks. Surrounded on

three sides, the company received heavy and continuous machine-gun and small-arms fire from strong enemy forces. With only 18 men and remnants of two other companies and with no heavy weapons support, the courageous infantrymen of Company C, 337th Infantry, held their positions against determined enemy attempts to recapture the hill. On the night of 13 May, relief arrived in the form of replacements, and a final enemy assault was repulsed successfully. Pressure was relieved by units attacking on both flanks of the hill position, and Company C was able to give supporting fire to both attacking elements. The indomitable fighting spirit and fortitude of the infantrymen of Company C, 337th Infantry, reflect the finest traditions of the Army of the United States."

The 1st Battalion, 337th, now entrenched itself firmly on and about Hill 66, and General Coulter, grim but confident throughout the battle, was now able to survey the prospects of a complete breakthrough of the enemy's line. By 0800 hours the morning after the attack opened, the German MLR had been penetrated by the 339th Infantry on Hill 79 and on Hill 69. Enemy counterattacks had failed to recapture these vital features.

The 338th Infantry had run into the same type of heavy machine-gun, mortar, artillery, and small-arms fire, and the same types of widely sown minefields. Casualties in this regiment too were very heavy, and companies were reduced to sixty to sixty-five per cent of their strength. The two lead battalions of the 338th, however, had not reached their objectives the morning following the opening of the offensive, and they were pinned down in what had formerly been no man's land. After some reorganization, another attack was ordered for 0800 hours. Still a third attack was ordered for 1300 hours. By 1500 hours of 12 May, the German MLR was beginning to crumble. The 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, had moved into Solacciano, which was on the southwest end of S Ridge. This occupation permitted the men of the 338th to bring direct small-arms fire on positions of the reverse slope of S Ridge.

Hill 79 was still held doggedly by Company G, 339th Infantry, although most of Company F, 339th, on Intermediate Ridge, had been surrounded and taken prisoner or destroyed during a strong enemy counterattack. In spite of the prolonged and heavy fighting and the large number of casualties, victory now seemed to be within the 85th's grasp. The enemy, however, had not yet conceded it and was still fighting fiercely, contesting every inch of the Custer Division's advance; and any advances that were made at this time were made in inches and yards.

By nightfall of 14 May the rest of the 337th Infantry had been

committed between the 338th and 339th Infantry Regiments and, driving forward with great spirit, had successfully assaulted and captured Hill 108, on the Germans' secondary line. The 338th had now overcome the strong resistance to its advance and had occupied all of S Ridge, including Hill 131 and Hill 85. On the 85th Division's right, the 88th Division had smashed through particularly stubborn resistance to capture the town of Santa Maria Infante.

By noon of 15 May General Coulter, General Gerow, Colonel Fitts and the Division staff, all of whom had planned and directed the great assault, as well as the unit commanders and their men who had fought it out with the Nazis foot by foot, were haggard but jubilant. The 338th Infantry had taken Hill 60 and the Cave d'Argilla area; the 339th was still holding Hills 66, 79 and 58; and the 337th had successfully repulsed two counterattacks to secure Hill 108. The Germans' Gustav Line had been smashed. The 85th Infantry Division, in its first major combat engagement, had overcome overwhelming obstacles and had decisively defeated the enemy who had been entrenched in an amazing network of strong fortifications and who had had every advantage afforded by the mountainous terrain. The victory was not without cost, however. Some of the Division's finest men lay dead or wounded. An indication of the fierceness of the fray was the fact that over 1,100 casualties were evacuated to the Division clearing station during the first forty-eight hours of the offensive.

A congratulatory message on this achievement was received by General Coulter from the Commanding General, II Corps. It repeated a message which II Corps had received from General Mark Clark, Fifth Army commander:

"To CG 85 Inf Div 15 May 1944

"Personal to Sloan and Coulter from Keyes

"The following message from Clark repeated for your information. Congratulations on the success which the forces under your command have achieved during past three days of intense fighting. I especially desire to commend the Eighty-Five and Eighty-Eight Divisions which are engaged in offensive combat for the first time and which have conducted themselves in a glorious manner, true to the traditions of the United States Army. Please congratulate Sloan and Coulter not only for their current successes but also for the manner in which they have

trained their divisions in preparation for these eventful days. Great victories are in store for the Fifth Army when it is composed of troops of the caliber of the II Corps."

The Custermen had come to grips with the enemy and very swiftly learned much about war. They saw that their great attack did not "surge" or "sweep" forward as accounts of such offensives often suggest. They found that each man hacked his way forward, inch by inch, yard by yard, amid a rain of death and in the face of persistent, tough opposition. They knew then, as they had suspected all along, that the glamor and the glory of war are confined to those who are not loaded down with grenades, who are not carrying a rifle firmly gripped and pointed at the enemy only a few yards away. They found that war was tough, bitterly so, and tiring to the point of the utmost in human exhaustion.

That same knowledge, however, gave the men their greatest inspiration. The enemy, the Nazis, had brought on this damaging, brutal conflict. They had started it without right or reason and the Custermen, as did most Americans, felt that the sacrifices and the hardships that they were enduring were the direct result of the enemy's unjust aggression and that he should be fiercely repaid for his crimes.

The Custermen had cracked a tough line of defense. The enemy had been thrown back partly as a result of great planning and leadership, but chiefly as a result of the relentless and dogged physical effort of each man involved. In this offensive, the enemy was proven by the Custermen to be not the Superman he might have appeared to be in the past. From their own efforts and to their own satisfaction, they found that he could be hurt and killed in great numbers.

Because battles are fought on the ground between isolated units, the Custermen at the moment of their great victory were hardly able to realize at once the tremendous significance of the contribution they had made to the success of the whole Fifth Army attack. The 88th Division, on the 85th's right flank, had seized the high ground ahead of the positions which the 339th Infantry had occupied when it first went into the line in March. This aided the French forces in their occupation of Castelforte. The 88th also took Santa Maria Infante on 12 May. The FEC, on the right of the 88th, had secured the initiative early in the attack by achieving surprise. The Germans, however, refused to yield the well prepared positions until after prolonged and desperate resistance. On Fifth Army's extreme left flank, however, in the sector of the 85th Division, something had happened that had not been expected or planned. The Custer Division had broken through the Gustav Line! Fifth Army's commander, General Clark, made immediate plans

to exploit the breakthrough, for continuing this advance overland would effect a more rapid junction with the beachhead forces than could be accomplished by the forces operating in the Liri Valley. The Eighth Army troops operating in the Liri Valley were fighting on the floor of the valley east of the Hitler Line and in the hills around Piedimonte. Sant' Angelo and Cassino were in Allied hands but the main fortifications remained to be taken. General Clark had placed the 85th Division on a 72-hour alert for possible withdrawal and movement to the beachhead. Effective at noon on 16 May, II Corps was to be prepared to turn over command of its sector to IV Corps and move to the beachhead on twenty-four hours' notice. With this new development of an unexpected breakthrough, however, General Clark now reasoned that time was the vital element and that an advance by II Corps overland would have a twofold result: it would assist Eighth Army in its advance up the Liri Valley, and it would complete the first step toward joining the beachhead forces along Route 7, and further permit the use of the 85th Division in the Anzio area at an earlier date than would have been possible had it been shipped by water. A swift and sweeping decision was necessary. In spite of the fact that II Corps' two divisions, the 85th and 88th, had fought a major action and no relief was available, General Clark ordered a rapid and continuous advance.

With the Gustav Line pierced, General Coulter ordered a new attack at once. At 1400 hours on 15 May, the 85th lashed out again at the Germans. The 338th Infantry took Mount Penitro, then drove southwest to the Croce road junction. From there it advanced west along Highway 7. This was done, however, only after it had been held up for a day by a strong counterattack. The Germans in this area were being outflanked by the 88th Division as it pushed westward across the mountains of the Formia corridor. They gave no indication that the outflanking movement bothered them, for the counterattack was vicious and prolonged. The 338th was forced to hold up for the night and resume its attack the next day. On the 16th it overcame the resistance.

The 2d Battalion of the 337th Infantry stormed up the steep slopes of Castellonorato in the wake of heavy artillery concentrations and a bombardment of the town by Allied air forces. It was behind Castellonorato that the enemy had located some of his biggest guns which had pounded the 85th since the first day it took over the coastal sector of the Fifth Army line. The air was filled, therefore, with a grim exuberance when at 1900 hours on 15 May this battalion took the town and drove some two thousand yards to the west beyond it in the direction of Maranola.

Major General Geoffrey Keyes, commander of II Corps, sent the following message to General Coulter on 17 May:

"To: Major General Coulter
CG 85th Division

"With the capture of Castellonorato and Scauri the 85 Division has accomplished extremely important parts of the II Corps mission, and the objective set by Army is within our grasp if we act boldly, vigorously, and promptly. This I call upon you to do. The sensing of victory which is in the air will far outweigh temporary physical fatigue, and leadership of officers and noncommissioned officers will inspire the men to continue on. Please accept for yourself and staff and for the troops under your command my sincere congratulations and admiration for a hard task well done and in anticipation of another early victory."

Passing through the 1st Battalion, 339th Infantry, the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron pushed down Highway 7, through the San Croce road junction and on in the direction of Formia. It was held up, however, by a blown bridge in Scauri, and the 1st Battalion, meeting no opposition, moved into the town. Once in the town, however, it had to fight remnants of the enemy garrison and, with the assistance of the 91st Recon, it mopped up pockets of enemy resistance in Scauri and on Mount Scauri. On the afternoon of 17 May the 339th Infantry moved into an area near Trivio behind the 337th Infantry.

The 337th Infantry, advancing toward Maranola, had run into strong resistance. The enemy was laying down heavy fire from Trivio. The 338th Infantry likewise was slowed down by enemy fire from the southern slopes of Mount Campese. The 338th was advancing on the 337th's left.

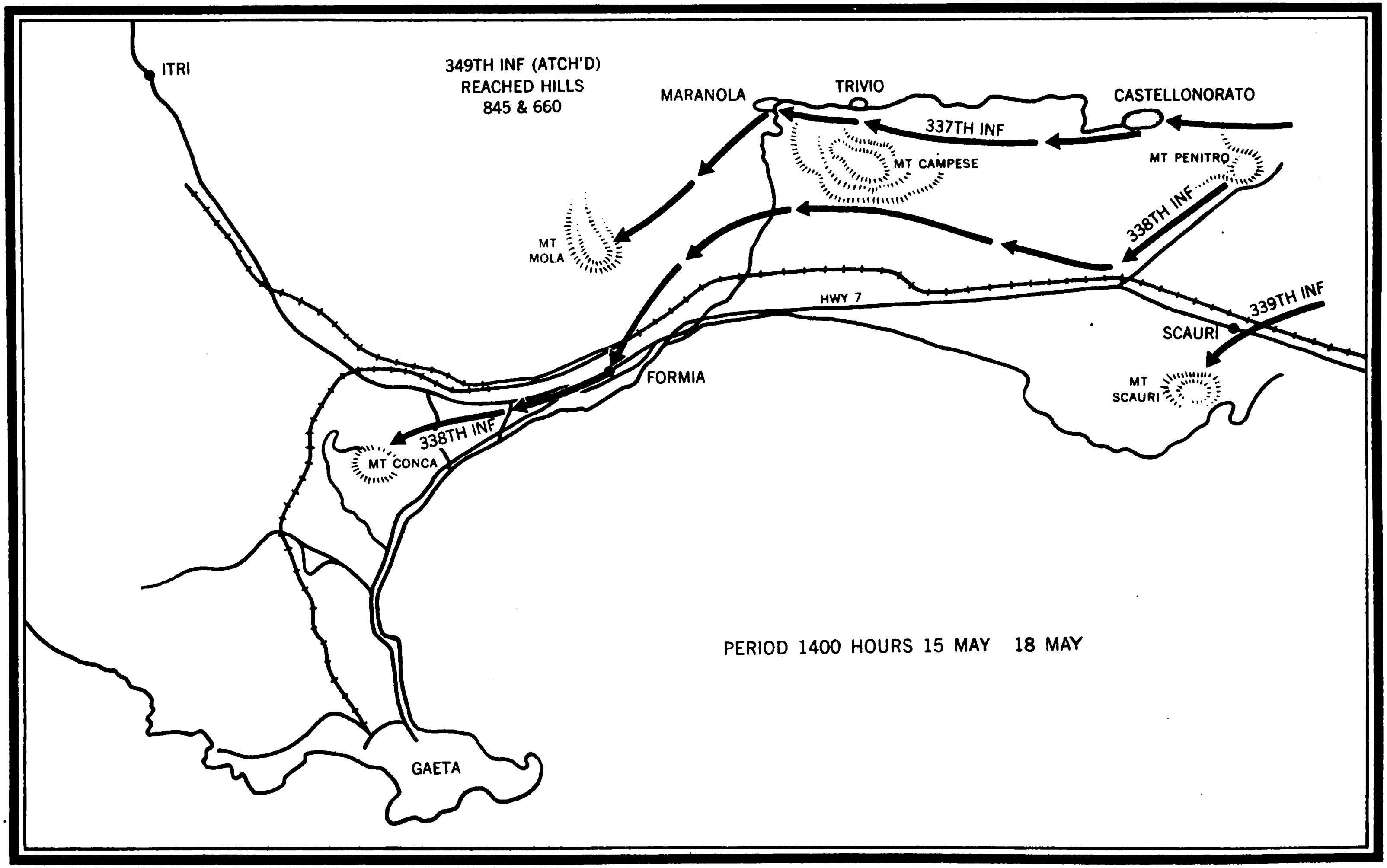
It was now apparent that the enemy was relying on delaying tactics to hold up the advance of the Division. In order to reduce this resistance and push on toward Formia and Itri with the greatest speed, General Coulter ordered an all-out attack for the morning of 17 May. The 337th drove forward, smashed through the German defenses at Trivio, and pushed on to take Maranola. Without pausing, this regiment continued the momentum of its offensive and drove on to capture Hills 906 and 510, as well as Mount Mola, where it finally halted for rest and reorganization. At the same time, the 338th Infantry was contributing to the success of this new action by driving forward on the left flank and overcoming resistance on the Dora Line of Mount Campese. Summon-

ing its strength in the face of fast approaching exhaustion, the 338th drove on into the coastal, summer resort town of Formia. Formia, the largest town yet taken by the 85th, had been in peacetime a pleasant spot of leisure. It had its business district along the main street, Highway 7, which ran through the center of town, but mainly it had its terraced villas, well shaded and surrounded by cool, attractive gardens along and near the waterfront. Native Formians and visitors to the resort loved the town, nestled in the center of the spacious, curving arc of the shoreline as it ran west from Scauri and then turned south beyond Formia and finally southwest to Gaeta. When the men of the 338th smashed into Formia, they felt truly like liberators. But, although most of the people were glad the Germans were gone, many civilians shook their fists at the Custermen, shouting that they would remember the *Americani* for this. "This" was the destruction of their town. It was not levelled, but it was heavily damaged. Not only the artillery, and in past days, the air force, but the Navy as well had poured high-explosive shells into Formia. The town had been used by the Germans as a headquarters and supply depot, and it was on the main supply route to the German forward positions in the Gustav Line. Many sections of the road through the town were badly damaged and the engineers had to construct new roads over the debris and the rubble. Many of the buildings had been completely destroyed. One man from the 338th Infantry said that as he went through several sections of the town he looked hard to find one whole brick standing intact upon another whole brick. He reported that he was unsuccessful. Many other buildings in the town, however, although missing a complete wall or a roof, and with the insides pretty well smashed, nevertheless appeared to be salvageable. Others, including many of the villas, were almost intact.

General Coulter now strengthened and broadened his front. The 349th Infantry of the 88th Division had been attached to the 85th, and it was now sent forward on the right of the 337th Infantry through the mountains north of the 85th Division's zone.

By 2400 hours, 18 May, the 338th had moved beyond Formia and was advancing toward Mount Conca. This placed the 85th on the road to Itri and in positions behind the enemy defenses on the Gaeta Peninsula.

At this point, Colonel Brady's 339th Infantry swung back into action, passing through the 337th Infantry and pushing on to take Mount Cefalo and Mount Merano by the afternoon of 20 May. The 338th Infantry, meanwhile, was busy with the occupation of Mount Pragone and Mount Conca and with mopping-up operations in the port and city



Map 4: *The Custermen strike out for Rome. (Scale 1:53,000)*

of Gaeta. The 338th reorganized in the Gaeta–Formia area on 20 May, preparing to continue the advance to the west and northwest.

The Germans were now on the run. In order to direct a close and vigorous pursuit, General Coulter had moved his forward CP to Formia. The battered remnants of the German 94th Division were withdrawing to the north and the northwest. Elements of the 104th Panzergrenadier Regiment of the 15th PG Division and the 620th Ost Battalion, which had been hurriedly thrown into the line to check the Custer Division's attack, were also in full retreat.

A pursuit force was organized on 20 May and was composed of the 2d Battalion, 337th Infantry, motorized; one company of the 756th Tank Battalion; one platoon of the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion; the 93d Armored Field Artillery Battalion; one platoon of the 85th Reconnaissance Troop; one platoon of Company A, 310th Engineer Battalion. This team started moving rapidly from Formia toward Itri.

The 339th, meanwhile, had been moving north over Mount Cefalo and Mount Onofrio, but its advance was delayed by flanking fire from the town of Itri. A battalion was dispatched to the town and after a short but spirited engagement, Itri was captured. It turned out to be the most completely demolished town yet taken, most of the destruction having been wrought by artillery and Allied planes. Street after street was filled with the rubble of stone houses smashed and blown into the street. A large percentage of the houses and other buildings was completely demolished. So high was the debris in one street that the engineers of II Corps, using powerful bulldozers, merely created a new road that ran along the same route as the old, only one story higher. Large forces of the 85th and its attached units were now coverging on Itri and the area around it. A great volume of abandoned matériel, records, and documents found in Formia, Gaeta, and Itri indicated that the enemy had been in great haste in withdrawing from these places. So fast was his retreat in this area that he had been unable to take with him two of the 170mm guns with which he had pounded the 85th Division for some time. These guns were found abandoned at Itri.

The enemy was now hard pressed to keep ahead of the 85th. He was very skillful in delaying tactics, however, and managed generally to hold the Division up in selected spots long enough to keep the main body of his forces barely out of the grasp of complete capture. The 339th Infantry, pressing on hard to the northwest, swept on through and past Fondi, but encountered delaying forces on Mount Calvo and Mount della Rocca. In the fight that followed the enemy was forced to withdraw. The 337th Infantry now moved up along Highway 7 and the railroad that paralleled it, swung to the rear of the 339th and

was committed on the Polar Bear Regiment's left flank. The direction of the 337th's attack was toward the town of San Biagio. The enemy had set up positions here and before the town could be taken a sharp fight was necessary. The German forces were defeated, many were killed and the regiment took eighty prisoners. One battalion of the 337th went on to the northwest to occupy the high ground overlooking San Biagio while the rest of the regiment drove southwest along Highway 7 toward Terracina.

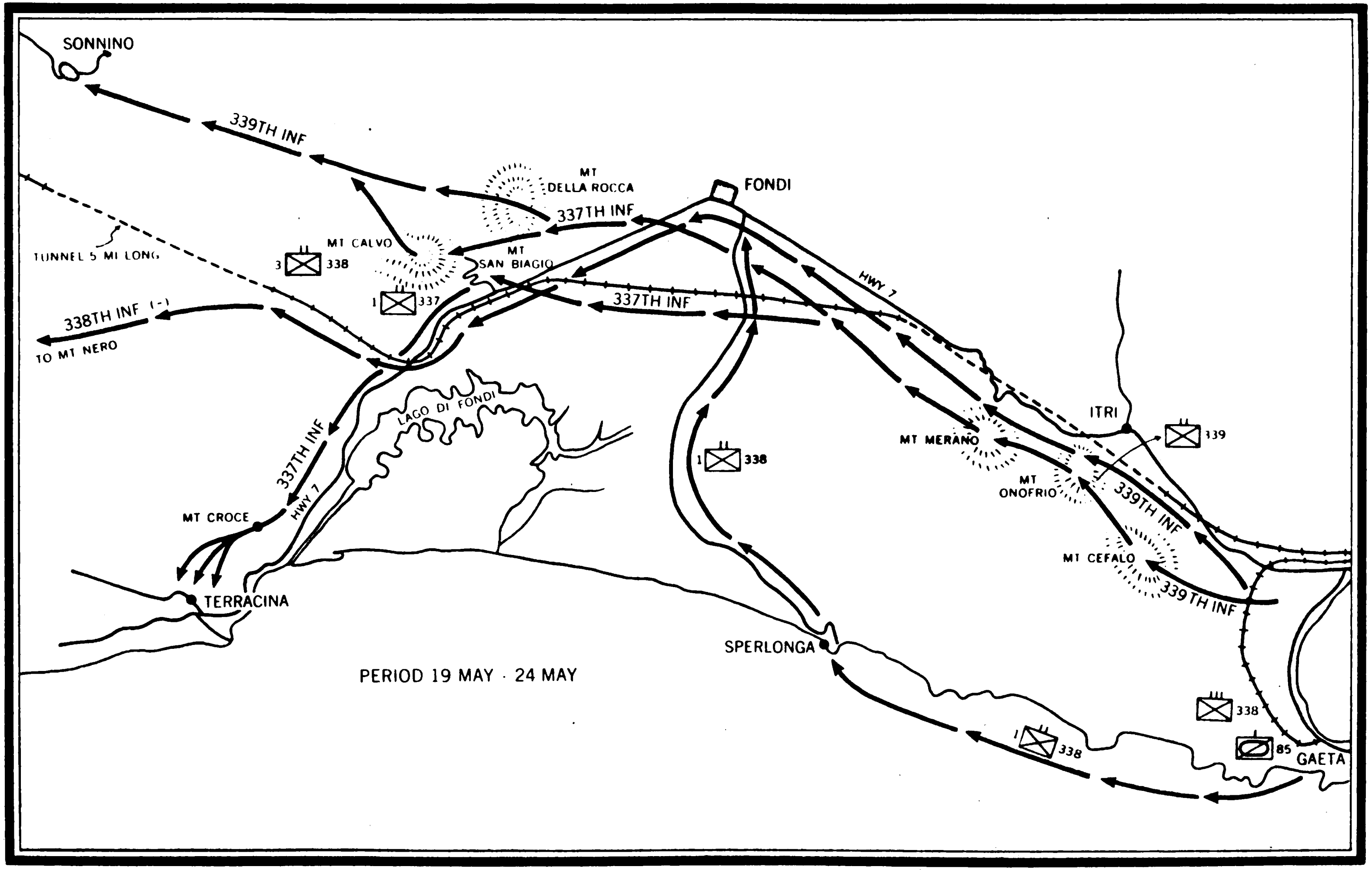
In the meantime, while these pockets of resistance were being smashed, II Corps had ordered the 85th Division to move the 338th Infantry by water from Gaeta to Terracina. One battalion of DUKWs (amphibious trucks) was made available for this operation. Late in the afternoon of 21 May the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, swarmed aboard the DUKWs and took to the water. This seaborne force landed at Sperlonga, some distance up the coast from Gaeta, but short of Terracina. The enemy was now pulling back fast from this area and resistance was stiffening at Terracina; so further water movement was abandoned and the 338th Infantry was assembled as Division reserve southwest of Fondi. This move for the 338th from Gaeta and Sperlonga to the Fondi assembly area was an exceedingly difficult one. The movement was by marching and motor. Highway 7 was the only road available between Formia and Fondi and this road was being used by both the 85th and 88th Divisions plus all the attached and II Corps troops.

The 85th Division's ordnance and service units, with all their equipment, vehicles and personnel, now moved up to Fondi to supply and service the continued advance of the Division. The German command, however, was informed of this move, apparently through radio reports from agents hidden in the mountains overlooking Fondi. At 0315 the following morning, German bombers came over Fondi, dropping flares to pick out the choice targets. They dropped their bombs on motor pools, truck repair areas, and supply and ammunition dumps and Division headquarters. Sergeant Prather, of the Chief of Staff section, lost an eye. The attack lasted only about a half hour, but many trucks were peppered with bomb fragments, and their tires were cut and deflated. Some ammunition stores were hit and fires were started. Worst of all, several men were killed as they slept on the ground and many others were wounded. One man left the comparative security of a building, dove into a ditch and crawled into a culvert under a section of dirt road. Normally he had what would have been considered the "best spot" around, but a bomb landed right at the opening of the culvert, wounding

him so severely that he later died. A short distance away, three other men were running for the shelter of their slit trenches when they heard the whistle of a falling bomb growing in intensity as it plunged nearer the earth. One of the men just barely made his trench and dove madly in. The other two were caught short and threw themselves flat on the ground. The bomb exploded with a sickening thunder a few yards away. The two men flat on the ground were both struck in the head by bomb fragments and died a few minutes later. The man in the slit trench got up and walked away. His small pick, which he had used to dig the trench and which he had stuck in the mound of earth at the head of it, was sheared off clean at the base of the upright blade by a fragment that had passed no more than an inch and a half above his head. An Italian family, sleeping on the ground in a straw hut a few feet away, was untouched, but the family goat, tethered to a stake, was killed. The family had just come back to Fondi after spending several months living in caves in the mountains above the town. Now, however, the head of the house drew and skinned the goat and with his wife and four small children headed back toward the hills.

On 22 May the 339th Infantry, which had overcome the resistance on Mount Calvo and Mount della Rocca, pressed into the mountains northwest of Fondi. Resistance was now slight. The enemy had withdrawn. The plan now was to drive over these mountains in a straight line to the Pontine Marshes where Highway 7 could be taken in the rear of the German forces operating in Terracina. High up in the mountains overlooking Terracina was the small hill town of Sonnino. The terrain ahead of the 339th was the roughest, most rugged and mountainous yet encountered. Supplies for the operation had to be carried by hand or mule-packed over the mountains. The regiment cut down to bare essentials and left the rest of its baggage and equipment to be transported by motor after Highway 7 through Terracina to Cisterna had been opened. The 339th turned off the main roads and trails at San Biagio and headed for Sonnino, twelve miles away.

The 1st Battalion led the way, with the 2d and 3d Battalions following. Capt. John Brennan's Company A led the entire force as the regiment pushed on up the mountain slopes following compass direction. At dawn on 22 May, the battalion was held up by machine-gun fire. This, however, was eliminated when Company A quickly deployed and attacked the enemy, using rifle grenades to great advantage. The company suffered eighteen casualties in the fight. The advance continued with men carrying loads of rations and ammunition on their backs as they climbed slowly and laboriously up the steep mountain sides. Be-



Map 5: The Division attacks by sea and over mountains; link-up with Anzio beachhead imminent. (Scale 1:180,000)

tween San Biagio and Sonnino there were three mountains in a direct line, each more than 1,500 feet high. In the excellent defense positions that this type of terrain afforded the enemy, there were many pockets of resistance, which the 2d Battalion discovered as it followed the 1st. The 2d Battalion was forced to clean up several of these as it labored up the slopes to the high ground overlooking Highway 7 and its advance was necessarily slow. Finally, on the morning of the 23d, all these pockets had been reduced. About noon of the same day, the 1st Battalion reached favorable positions from which it could attack Sonnino. The 2d Battalion, however, had not yet joined the 1st, and, in addition, the entire regiment had already outstripped the supporting artillery. The Germans suddenly made an appearance, firing antiaircraft guns at the 1st Battalion. The muzzle velocity of these weapons was so great that the sound of the gun firing and the explosion of the shell at its target were almost simultaneous sounds. Lying momentarily helpless under fire of these guns produced a withering and terrifying sensation.

Company B, commanded by Capt. Luther Carroll, now began to move up to join the rest of the battalion after engaging a group of the enemy in a sharp fight in which fourteen of the enemy were killed and seven taken prisoner. Company B suffered no casualties. The 2d Battalion was also moving up alongside the 1st, and it too hit the dirt under the impact of the enemy's AA guns. The preparation for the attack went on, however, and the 2d Battalion pushed on up into the high ground from which it could lend supporting fire. The 3d Battalion had now joined the 1st, and at 1830 hours the attack on Sonnino began. Company A was on the right and Company B on the left in the 1st Battalion. The line-up in the 3d Battalion was Company I in the center, Company L on the right, with Company K on the left. The 2d Battalion supported the attack from its high positions and supporting fire was also given by the two other battalions' heavy-weapons companies, D and M.

The attack was a complete surprise, and the enemy was caught flatfooted. Almost a hundred Germans were killed and forty were captured. Captain Carroll's machine gunners accounted for twenty of the killed and thirty of the captured when the enemy, hurriedly trying to withdraw, ran into the fire from their guns. One of the Nazis captured was the commander of the 3d Battalion, 15th Panzergrenadier Regiment. He told his captors that he and his troops did not believe the Americans could come over those mountains, and the first knowledge he had had of the 339th's presence was when he received an emergency message stating that the Americans were on both flanks and that retreat was impossible.

The 337th Infantry, meanwhile, was heading down Highway 7 to the southwest toward Terracina, at right angles to the direction taken by the 339th. This drive plus the 339th's surprise smash through the mountains toward Sonnino gravely threatened Terracina by land. The Germans had been long expecting an attack on Terracina by sea, since the beach was good and the precipitous mountains came down to the sea. The Germans had put up strong fortifications at Terracina, but most of their guns and the fields of fire from their pillboxes pointed out to sea, to repel the expected amphibious assault. Like the British at Singapore, the Germans at Terracina were thrown off balance by the suddenness and intensity of an overland attack aimed at taking the seaward defenses from the rear.

General Coulter now calculated that here was the time to again commit all his strength. The 338th Infantry had enjoyed a short, well deserved rest at Gaeta, where they had been billeted in what remained of the villas along the coast. The troops had had a chance to swim in the salt water, to replace their damaged equipment, and to get a change of clothing. From Gaeta the 338th had moved to a Division reserve area near Fondi. Now the 338th was thrown into the fight for Terracina and was committed in the mountainous area to the right of the 337th. The plan was for the 338th to outflank Terracina and occupy the northern slopes of the mountains overlooking the Pontine Marshes. As they started driving into the mountains, however, the men of the 338th ran into resistance almost at once. A short battle raged near the mouth of a railroad tunnel. Prisoners taken established that the German forces now facing the 338th were elements of the 71st Panzergrenadier Regiment of the 29th Division. The Custermen reduced the opposition and pushed on, leaving the 3d Battalion, reinforced by elements of the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion, on guard at the mouth of the tunnel. This tunnel was about five miles long and had been used by the Germans for bringing troops and supplies under the mountains and into the areas where they were trying to stop the advance of the Custer Division. The 15th and 71st Regiments of the 29th Division had hurriedly moved south from the vicinity of Rome during the night of 20-21 May to be thrown in against the 85th in the breach between the Anzio Beachhead and the fast-moving Custer Division pounding up Highway 7 toward Terracina and the Pontine Marshes. Elements of both regiments had used the railroad tunnel in order to reach the other side of the mountains.

The 337th Infantry was now locked in battle with strong German defense forces operating at the final approaches to Terracina. This town and the stretch of Highway 7 beyond it toward Rome were vital to

the Nazi defense and they appeared to be determined that it should not fall. The 337th stormed the enemy defenses at Mount Croce and, after a fight, captured this objective. The Germans, however, were not easily turned back. They counterattacked in strength and with such force and fire power that they recaptured the hill. The 337th was back where it had started, but it bounced back with a second attack and this time took the hill and successfully held it.

Along the base of the hill, at Highway 7, road demolitions, antitank and rocket fire had temporarily stopped tanks of the 760th Tank Battalion and mechanized elements of the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron. These units had now joined the growing forces assaulting Terracina.

The 85th Division Artillery commander and the commander of the 2d Chemical Mortar Battalion now gave Colonel Hughes heavy supporting fire which enabled the 337th to make further advances and take Hill 133. The enemy was still resisting fiercely with his own strong artillery support. Prisoners of war taken by the 337th identified the enemy forces now operating in this area as the 103d Reconnaissance Battalion and the 2d Battalion of the 15th Panzergrenadier Regiment.

Finally, on the night of 24-25 May, with three battalions abreast, the 337th swarmed down out of the hills, overcame final German resistance, and captured and cleared Terracina of enemy defenders. The 338th, meantime, had cleared the hill mass immediately north of Terracina and had captured Mount Leano on the morning of 24 May. The 339th, pushing on through Sonnino, had reached the Amaseno River line, had taken Belvedere and was still advancing. Terracina had fallen and the road to the Anzio Beachhead was now open.

Breaking out into open ground, the 85th dashed north with all possible speed. The Custermen were close on the heels of the enemy, who was executing a rapid withdrawal. The Germans tried to make a stand in delaying positions along the line of hills running generally east from Sezze. However, the 338th and the 339th Infantry Regiments stormed forward under heavy and brilliant supporting fire by the 85th Division Artillery and elements of the 760th Tank Battalion and the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The enemy withdrew. Elements of the 338th then swept into Sezze a short time after the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron had entered it from the east.

As this great battle for Terracina and the high ground to the north and northwest of it reached its final stages, Maj.Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, commanding VI Corps, assisted by diversionary action of the British 1st and 5th Divisions, launched a savage attack early on the morning of 23 May in an effort to smash out of the encirclement of the Anzio

Beachhead. The U.S. 36th Division had already moved from Naples to Anzio, where it had closed on 22 May. The 1st Special Service Force struck out from the right shoulder and cut the ancient Appian Way (Highway 7). The U.S. 3d Infantry Division attacked Cisterna, completely enveloping the town in a stubborn, savage two-day battle. On 25 May, the 3d Division stormed the town and captured it, sending elements on toward Cori.

The U.S. 1st Armored Division, striving to break out in its sector, drove north and northeast but quickly encountered heavy minefields. These were cleared after some delay and the advance was resumed. By 25 May forward elements had cut the road two kilometers northwest of Cori, placing that town in the jaws of a trap that closed on it the next day.

The U.S. 45th Division, another veteran of the long Italian Campaign, struck out from the left shoulder of the Anzio Beachhead but was suddenly forced to fight off severe enemy counterattacks. It kept plunging forward, however, and managed to advance five kilometers beyond its initial positions. Meantime, the U.S. 34th Division moved up and occupied positions held by the armor and the 1st Special Service Force as they continued to move forward. British troops on the extreme left made strong attacks against heavy resistance and managed to achieve local gains.

It was at this point, on 25 May, with General Truscott's forces smashing out of the Beachhead, that a composite group from VI Corps, chiefly reconnaissance and engineer troops, joined hands with a similar composite group from II Corps, plus elements of the 85th Division. The Beachhead and the main Fifth Army front at last were one—one solid line of fighting men, one strong, powerful, striking force. However, the advance of VI Corps eastward across the II Corps front caused the 85th Division to be squeezed out of the line; so on 28 May, after forty-nine days of continuous operations against the enemy, the Custer Division was relieved from front-line combat. On 29 May it moved to a rest area near Sabaudia.

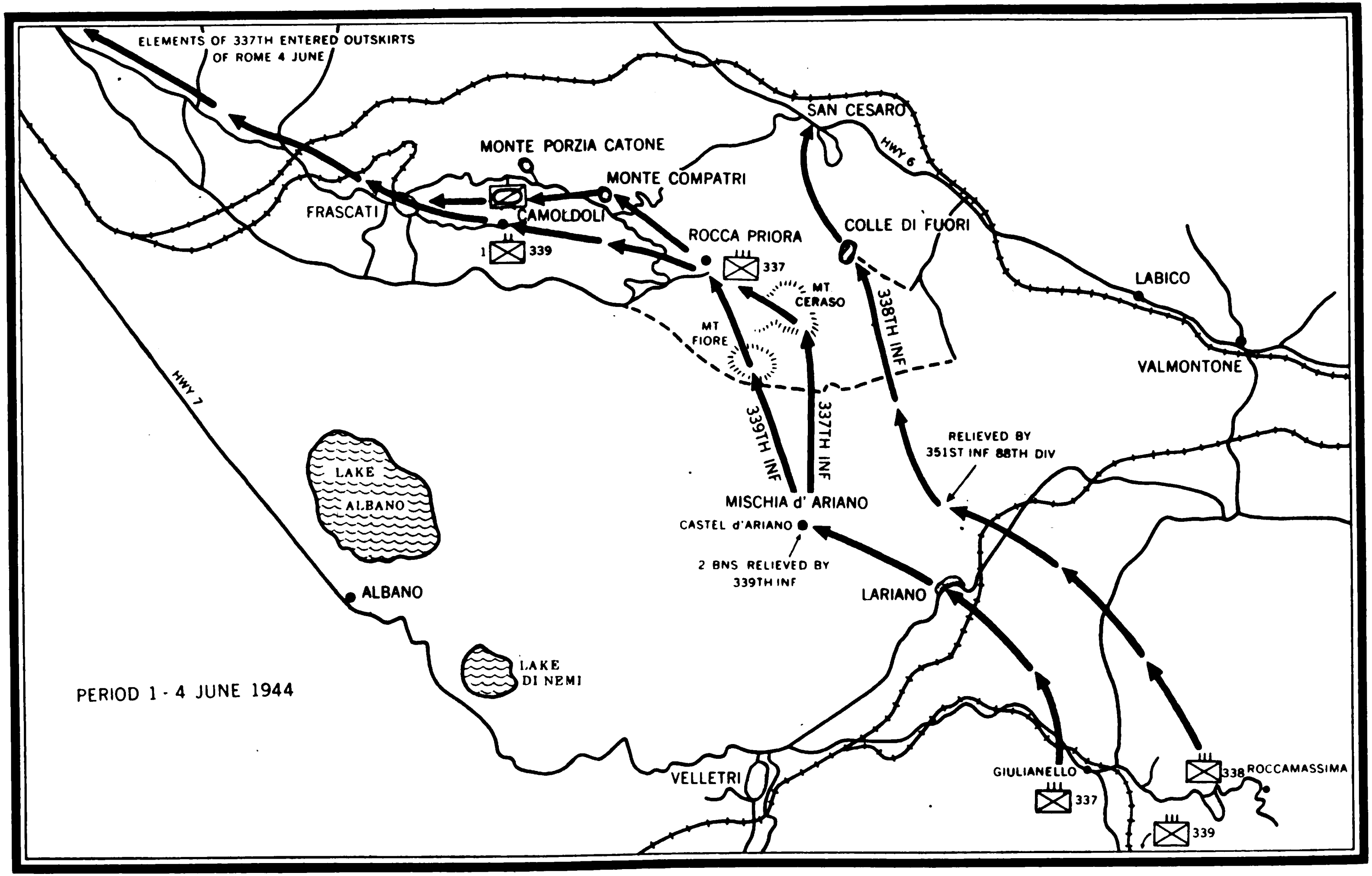
One of the two great accomplishments of which Mussolini was wont to boast was the filling in and building up of the Pontine Marshes (the other was the meticulous punctuality of the Italian trains). In 1935 he had had constructed near the seacoast, on the Pontine Marshes, the city of Sabaudia. It was a clean-looking city with many modern, cream-colored stone buildings, including attractive apartment houses. Because of its lack of strategic value it had been little damaged by the war. At first glance the populace did not seem to have fared badly,

but one of the 85th Division chaplains, conversing in Latin with a local priest, learned that the Germans had erected signs in the fields among the crops warning the Italians that mines had been planted there and that anyone caught harvesting any of the crops—which had been ear-marked for the German Army—would be shot.

Dictionaries do not contain words for the proper description of the feelings of the Custermen as they threw themselves to the ground on the grass and in the shade of the Sabaudia rest area. "Sheer exhaustion" and "complete weariness" are wholly inadequate. When men have fought for days, marched over mountainous terrain for miles and for hours on end, when they have gone without sleep and clawed the earth, day after day and night after night, under the whine of machine-gun fire and the demoralizing crunch of artillery and mortar barrages; when they have endured the pain of bruised and often broken arms and legs, yet pushed on; when they have strained their backs with the weight of heavy loads—they seem to have passed beyond the point of conceivable limits of human endurance. One 339th officer, Lt. James L. Mulcahy, of Taunton, Massachusetts, sat under the shade of a tree in the rest area, nursing his swollen and bruised feet. "My men are *tired,*" he said, with prolonged and emphatic stress on the word *tired.* "Their eyes are bloodshot. Some of them are so tired they literally cannot see. Two men coming into this area yesterday walked right into trees. Two days ago, two other men, sound asleep on their feet during a march, walked right off the road and out into a field. Another man had to go after them, wake them up, and get them back in line." "My men are utterly worn out," continued Mulcahy, who commanded a platoon in Company E. "Their legs and backs and arms ache beyond description, and I don't see how some of them right now could stand up unaided on their own feet and put one foot in front of the other to take a forward step." Mulcahy later sacrificed his life while exposing himself to enemy fire to direct mortar fire on two German machine-gun nests in the Gothic Line offensive north of Florence (Firenze).

The sense of victory was in the air, however. Capture of the great city of Rome was within Fifth Army's grasp. General Clark, realizing the value of maintaining the momentum of the offensive and reasoning that the nearness of this overwhelming, historic victory would outweigh temporary physical fatigue, ordered the 85th Division back into action. On the same day, 29 May, with but one short day's rest, the 85th received orders to rejoin the fight.

By now, Cori had fallen to the 3d Division, and the 34th, 45th, and 1st Armored Divisions which were attacking astride the Cisterna–



Map 6: *The final advance on Rome. (Scale 1:144,000)*

Campoleone railroad had taken Campoleone and were closing in on Lanuvio. The 3d Division had seized Artena and by 30 May was approaching the outskirts of Valmontone. Along the entire front the tempo of the offensive was increasing. The enemy was clearly about to be routed, but added pressure was needed to turn the probability into a wonderful reality.

Accordingly, the 85th Division was now moved from Sabaudia northeast to the Lariano–Giuglianello sector. As the Custermen, loaded on trucks and jeeps, roared down the main gravel road leading from the Sabaudia rest area, hundreds of Italian civilians lined the dust-drenched route cheering the Division on. They waved handkerchiefs or whatever pieces of cloth they could find. Everyone, from the oldest man down to the smallest child able to stand, held up two fingers of his right hand, giving the "V for Victory" sign. For the first time the Custermen were greatly uplifted by such a demonstration of enthusiasm and encouragement. On 30 May the 85th moved into its new sector.

In the town of Lariano and in the hills that overlooked it from the north, were German forces bent on holding up the advance, at least until the main body of the enemy forces could extricate itself from imminent encirclement. Intelligence reports received from the 3d Division, just relieved by the 337th and the 338th Infantry Regiments, indicated that the enemy's defensive positions were occupied by elements of the 3d Panzergrenadier Division and the Hermann Goering Panzer-Parachute Division.

The 85th's new sector lay about midway between the two great highways leading to Rome. Highway 6 from Cassino approached Rome from the southeast, passing about five miles north of Lariano. Highway 7, leading to Rome from the south, passed about four miles west of Lariano. Ahead of the Division lay hilly, rocky country all the way to Frascati at the southeastern edge of the Tiber Valley. Ahead of the Custermen, twenty-three miles away, lay Rome, which would be the greatest prize of the war to date. The terrain between was thickly covered with chestnut and pine trees and everywhere were vineyards and terraced, silver-leafed olive groves.

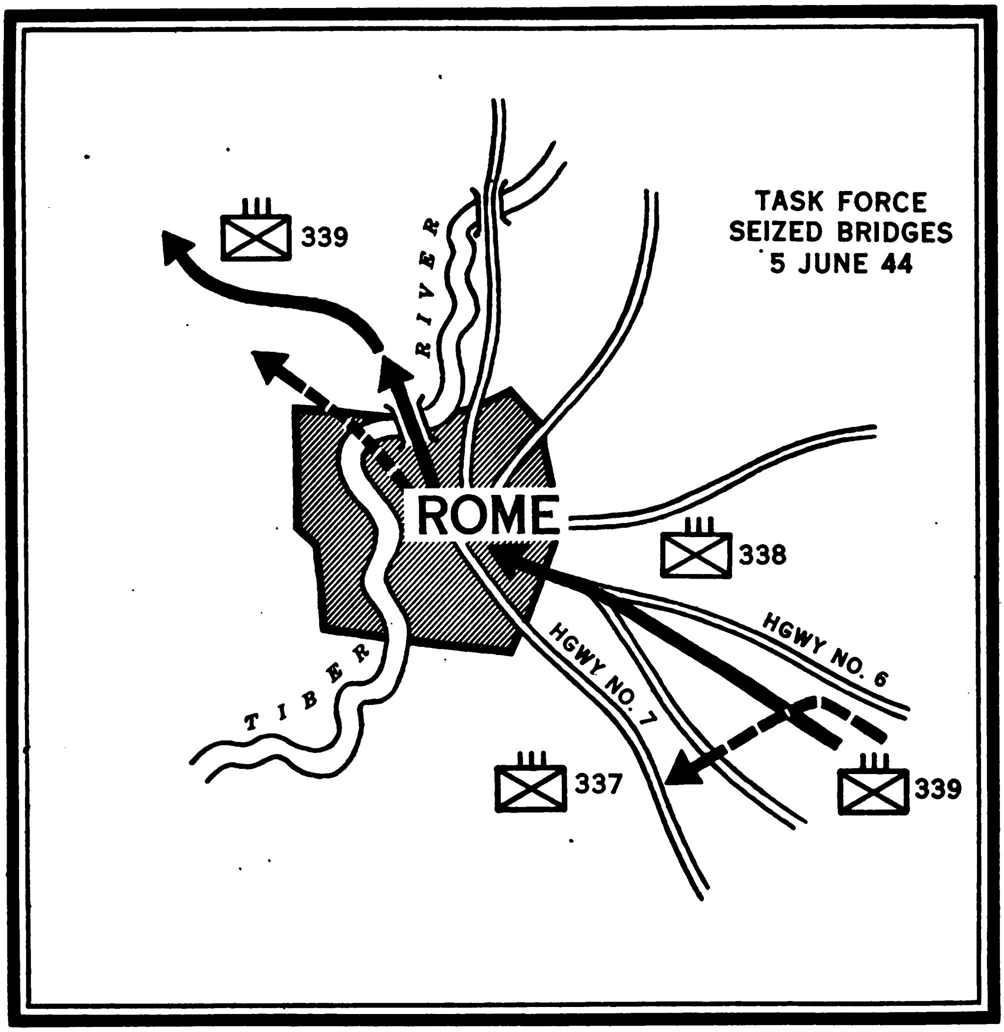
The 85th Division Artillery, which had fought magnificently all the way up from Minturno and had evoked high praise for its accurate fire and swift movement, now moved up in supporting positions behind the infantrymen. At 1300 on 31 May the attack began, with the 337th Infantry leading the assault. The 1st and 3d Battalions, with the 1st Battalion on the right, moved up and by-passed Lariano on each side. Then the 2d Battalion sent up a reinforced company into Lariano to reduce the rear-guard forces in the town. The enemy was stubborn and

fought back hard, and it was only after a bitter and prolonged fight that the town was cleared. The other battalions pushed on. On 1 June the 338th swung into action north of Lariano and during the morning and part of the afternoon fought against determined opposition. Late in the day, however, the resistance let up and there were unmistakable signs that the enemy was withdrawing. At midnight, the 338th was relieved by the 351st Infantry of the 88th Division, but it was now seen that the enemy's comparatively orderly retreat was about to turn into a full rout. The 338th was immediately recommitted and resumed the pursuit of the badly battered Hermann Goering Division. On the night of 2 June the 338th reached San Cesaro and cut Highway 6, killing a large number of Germans frantically trying to escape along the road. The regiment then went into Division reserve, except for the 3d Battalion which was attached to the 339th Infantry to become its reserve battalion.

On 1 June the 339th took Castel d'Ariano, the highest point of the Maschio d'Ariano hill mass. The regiment pushed on steadily for several miles, meeting only occasional sniper and self-propelled-gun fire. Swinging to the northwest, however, on 2 June, the regiment ran into enemy mortar and artillery fire on Mount Fiore, southeast of Rocca Priora. The 339th attacked this resistance at once and reduced it without delay. It then went on to seize Mount Salamone and Mount San Sebastiano.

The 85th Reconnaissance Troop turned in a neat bit of fighting on 3 June. Just south of Mount Compatri it ran into a heavy fire fight. With smooth teamwork and accurate marksmanship, it routed the enemy, killing forty and taking sixty-five prisoners. The troop then advanced to Frascati where it cleared the town of snipers. The 339th swung into the town shortly afterward and continued to advance until it halted for the night three miles from Rome.

Meanwhile, the 337th Infantry was smashing away at very heavy resistance. The Germans were operating in the thickly wooded draws, using roving snipers and motorized patrols. For some time they were successful in holding up the regiment, and on several occasions drove wedges into the exposed right flank of the 1st Battalion. Furthermore, the enemy here was successful at infiltrating and the 1st Battalion CP at one time was completely surrounded. The battalion commander rounded up all the available men and the enemy was defeated, leaving many dead. Colonel Hughes now brought up tanks and tank destroyers to aid the foot troops and soon hill after hill was falling into the regiment's hands. The enemy in this sector fought stubbornly, not wishing to give up this important ground. The 337th struck hard at him, however, and by the night of 2 June the 2d Battalion had reached a point



Map 7: The 85th joins in the liberation of the Eternal City. (Scale 1:252,000)

a scant 1,200 yards south of Highway 6. At this point, the 85th Division was more than two miles ahead of the rest of the entire Fifth Army line, striking swiftly for Rome.

On 3 June orders were received changing the direction of the 85th's advance and the Custermen, instead of continuing north, turned sharply to the northwest, cutting across Highway 7. Enemy forces retreating toward Rome up Highway 7 were thus cut off. This mission accomplished, the 85th swung north again and headed for Rome, but other elements of Fifth Army had already entered the outskirts of the city. On 4 June the leading elements of the 85th Division entered the Eternal City.

The liberation of Rome was a tonic to the Allied world, hungry for some tangible sign that the enemy was weakening—some faint indica-

tion that the end of this long, tortuous trail of sacrifice, suffering, and death was in sight. To the people of Rome it was the occasion for a delirious holiday. Their joy at being free of Nazi oppression, as well as Italian Fascist domination, was unbounded. More than twenty years of Mussolini's Fascist control, followed, with the fall of Italy in 1943, by a harsh, ruthless, and terror-laden Nazi rule had keenly whetted the natural desire of the Romans to be free—to be rid of the intrusions, the tortures, and the assassinations of a policed state.

Into the streets of Rome, along the path of advance of the victorious Fifth Army, poured thousands upon thousands of Roman citizens. They threw their arms about their liberators, shook the hands of tired, bearded, marching soldiers. From nowhere they produced their finest red and white wines, which they poured into sparkling wine glasses and handed to the victors as they passed on foot, in jeeps, in trucks, in half-tracks, or in tanks. They so filled the streets that the troops on foot almost had to pick their way through the crowds and the convoys had to slow down to two and three miles per hour. They swarmed over jeeps, tanks and trucks, laughing and chattering in a mood of great joy. From one end of Rome to the other it seemed that as each tank, truck, jeep, or foot soldier passed a given spot there was a spontaneous burst of prolonged applause accompanied by the hoarse roar of grateful people.

One group of 85th Division men met a priest at one point in the line of march when the convoys halted. They were surprised when he spoke to them in fluent English. When one of the men asked the priest where he had picked up the language, he replied with a sly smile: "I have been speaking it all my life. I was born in Dublin."

The crowd was utterly unmindful of the dangers that still lingered in Rome. Snipers were still active and there were a few machine-gun nests hidden in buildings and manned by die-hard Fascists. At one point, the machine gunners had set up on the third floor of an apartment house, from where they were firing on the convoy as it passed along the street below. The convoy had to be detoured off its main route while riflemen attacked the machine-gun nest. They fired up into the apartment house from the street but were answered by a heavy volume of fire. For 150 yards in each direction the civilians melted from the street. But 150 yards down the road the crowd refused to budge. They stayed, cheering the foot troops and convoys on as machine-gun bullets ricocheted off the walls of buildings. Finally, three riflemen, armed with rifle grenades, went into the apartment house and up the stairs toward the third floor. They eliminated a guard at the head of the stairs and then went on to fire into the room where the machine guns were set up. The detour was removed.

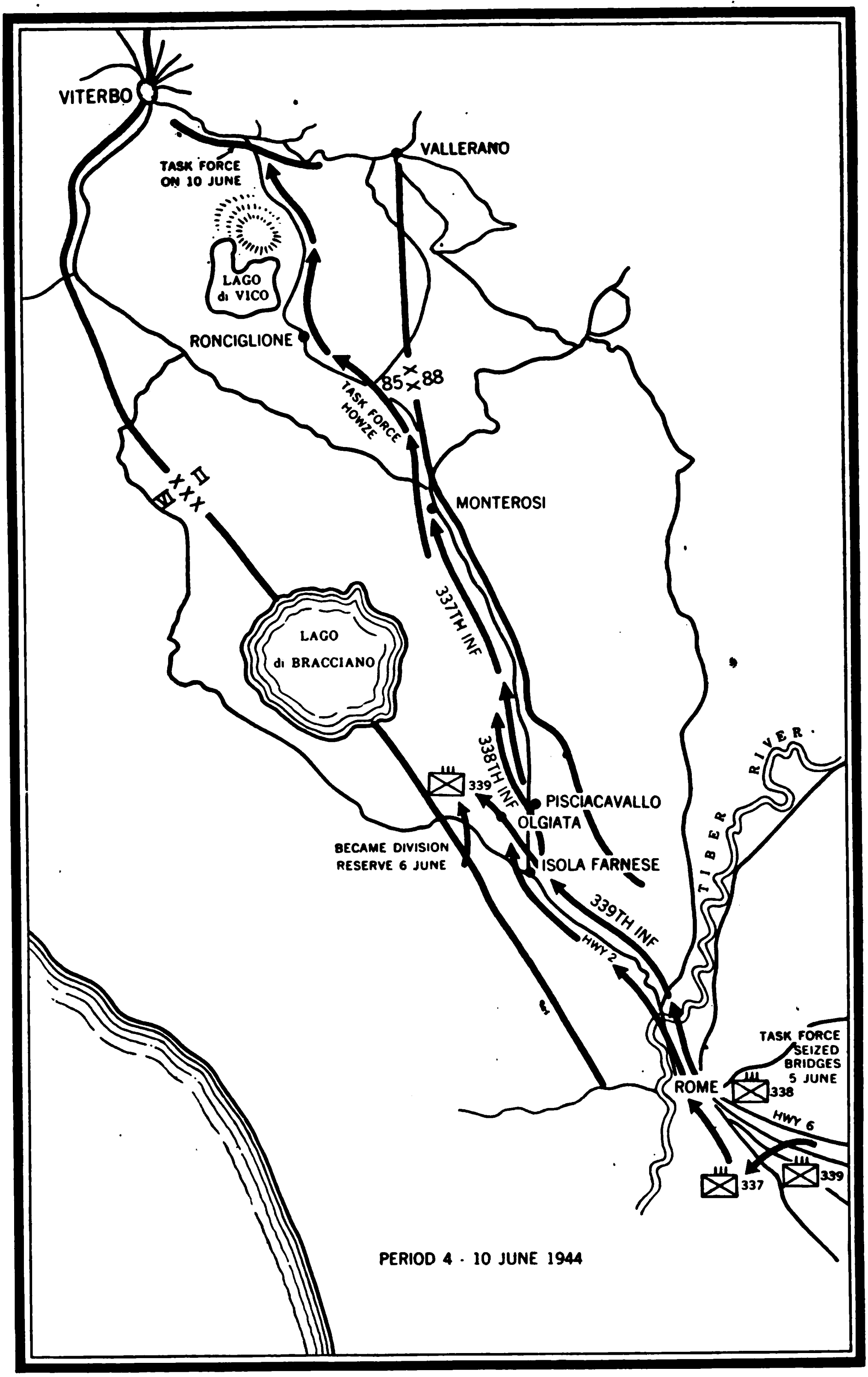
The 85th Division had every right to be proud of its accomplishments in the great campaign for the liberation of Rome. The men of the Division had fought hard all the way; they had given all they had; their tremendous force and aggressiveness and the machine-like efficiency of their offensives had stamped the Division, in the minds of other troops, as an outstanding fighting force, and in the minds of the enemy as a menace to be soberly reckoned with. In a message to the army commander, General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, said:

"My congratulations to you personally, and to the commander and men of the Eighty-Fifth Division. Their splendid performance and fortitude have awakened great enthusiasm over here and will have a depressing effect on the German high command."

The Custer Division had participated in and had contributed immensely to the success of one of the truly great events of military history. Throughout 2,500 years, in all the battles that had raged in and about Rome, in all the times Rome had been sacked, captured or liberated, the city had never before been taken from the south. Most commanders of the past had considered such a feat impossible of accomplishment. The reason for this was the ruggedness of the mountainous terrain which made an attack on Rome from the south a back-breaking and an uphill fight all the way.

Now Rome was in Allied hands, freed of the Axis yoke, the first of the three Axis capitals to be occupied. Rome, within whose walls lay the ruins of a civilization that flourished two thousand years before America was discovered; Rome, steeped in great literature, painting, history, and architecture; Rome, the center of Christendom, was free.

A task force composed of the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, reinforced, secured three bridges across the Tiber River on 5 June and was followed swiftly by the 339th Infantry, advancing in a column of battalions, which by 1400 hours on 5 June had placed two battalions across the Tiber. The 337th also moved west of the Tiber, and General Coulter moved his Division command post to a point a half mile north of Rome on Via Trionfale.



Map 8: *The Division's advance beyond Rome. (Scale 1:306,000)*

Part V: *The Gothic Line*

THE 85TH DIVISION swung northwest along Highway 2 toward Viterbo in hot pursuit of the enemy who was now fleeing frantically north toward the Arno River and Florence (Firenze). All along the way now were mute signs of the great German debacle. Large numbers of the Germans had been caught fleeing north of Rome by planes of the Mediterranean Allied Air Force, which had done a tremendous job of air support in the entire drive on Rome. Strewn along both sides of the road was the burned and abandoned wreckage of enemy equipment, including guns, tanks, and vehicles. The panicky Nazis were fleeing north in every type of vehicle they could find—old trucks, motorcycles, ambulances, Italian buses, and bicycles.

Firmly entrenched in their steep, lofty mountain defenses, the Germans had felt secure as they resisted the Allied offensives. Now, flushed out into the open country north of Rome, they had no such mountainous wall to protect them. Highway 2, running north toward Viterbo, wound through pleasant green and brown fields in gently rolling country. One could look for miles across the rich pasture lands and olive groves and here and there a patch of woods to the far-off mountain ranges, purple in the sunset. At some spots, on a hill or a bluff, the Germans set up small delaying positions. Some sharp fights developed, but the overall delaying effect was insignificant.

The 339th Infantry pursued the enemy to Olgiata and then gave way, passing to Division reserve as the other two regiments took up the chase. These two regiments were organized into combat teams, each with a company of tanks, a company of tank destroyers, and a platoon of the 85th Reconnaissance Troop attached. A fast armored unit, Task Force Howze (led by Col. Hamilton Howze, 1st Armored Division), with the 1st Battalion of the 337th Infantry attached to it, was attached to the Division and drove hard on the heels of the enemy. One outstanding indication of the fact that the enemy was now hard pressed was his failure to lay extensive minefields.

Prisoners were coming into the Division's cages in droves, but they were now mostly the scattered, confused, and isolated remnants of the enemy's forces thrown in to delay as best they could the speed of the Allied pursuit. Among the prisoners were rifle-toting members of cook and baker schools and the group was so motley that one prisoner turned out to be a member of the 20th Air Force Division and another was from the 4th Parachute Division.

At long last relief came for the 85th Division. On 9 June, with the Division's leading elements at a point east of Lake di Vico, the Custer Division was relieved by the 3d Algerian Infantry Division of the French Expeditionary Corps. Task Force Howze continued on until finally stopped by corps order at a point just southeast of Viterbo. The FEC continued the full pursuit.

The 85th Division had pursued the enemy some forty-six miles beyond Rome. Since 10 April the 85th had been in action sixty out of sixty-two days. Since 11 May it had advanced 135 miles, smashing the vaunted Gustav Line, opening the road to the Anzio Beachhead, and playing an important part in the capture of Rome. The Custermen had virtually destroyed the German 94th Division, and had cut up much of the 29th and the Hermann Goering Divisions.

Now had come the time for a highly deserved rest. The Division was ordered to a rest and training area ten miles west of Rome, at the famed Lido di Roma.

The assignment to the Lido di Roma area did not turn out to be one grand vacation. It was, after all, only a pause between combat missions. In spite of the general sentiment among the troops that "the least they can do now is give us a month off," shortly after arrival in the new area the Division began an intensive training program, eight hours a day, six days a week. Many replacements had joined the Division in the past few weeks and priority was now given to training for them which would bring them up to the Division's standards of tactical skills. Replacements, generally, were a serious problem for all combat divisions. Most of the replacements, officers and enlisted men alike, for the Rome offensive, had come from the "Dairy Farm," a large replacement depot not far from Caserta. Some of them had been there a long time. Many came from other replacement pools in Africa. Many arrived direct from infantry replacement training centers in the United States. Few had ever been part of a regular unit. Compared to the seemingly endless months of training which had been given the 85th Division, most of these men had had little training. The average was six to eight months, while some had as much as ten months to a year. Some of the replacements had had the misfortune to join the Division under the worst possible circumstances. The men who were with the Division when it arrived in Italy had been indoctrinated gradually by being assigned to front-line positions in a stabilized line. Then, too, these men had had months and months of excellent training behind them. The replacements who were rushed up and sent into action at the height of the offensive against the Gustav Line went directly from the replacement pool into combat. In addition to enduring the strain of going into

battle in the midst of a major offensive, these men were beset all the way up by dozens of ugly rumors which drifted back to the rear areas. These rumors were dangerous. One replacement said that he had heard that one battalion of the 337th Infantry had been wiped out; that out of eight hundred men there were only two left. One of the two was still lying up there on the battlefield, horribly wounded, and the other managed to escape and get back to the rear to relate the horrible disaster.

Of course, no such thing had happened, but this replacement was now convinced that it had. The damage had been done. By the time this man reached the front line, he was so terror-stricken that he was utterly worthless to the Division; he was unable to aid the attack in any way.

Three other men in another group of replacements had heard a rumor from someone who was not there but who had heard the story from a man who said that it came to him from some men who were present. These replacements, it should be understood, were enlisted men scheduled to go forward in two or three hours to be assigned to rifle platoons where they would be under the command of lieutenants. The story they heard was that up in the front lines, officers—platoon leaders—lieutenants—were lying behind their men in foxholes firing at them with rifles in order to get them to go forward and attack the enemy. Those who failed to go forward, so the tale went, the officers would shoot. This was, of course, completely baseless, but it is not difficult to imagine the state of mind of the replacement as he was assigned to a platoon, commanded by Lieutenant X.

The sensible decision was finally made that replacements must spend three days in a regimental area behind the lines, receiving indoctrination and orientation. In this way the new men had a chance to get close to the front, hear the guns, talk to men who had been in action, and listen to explanations and refutations of the rumors that were driving them frantic with fear—weird tales that would cause the bravest of men to flinch.

The new 85th Division training program concentrated on small-unit problems—squad and platoon—and attack of a heavily fortified position. The oldtimers, as well as the replacements, took the training, and each battalion in the Division participated in an exercise involving this type of fighting. It was now late June and the summer sun was hot. The eight-hour training days were long and tiring, but they were easier to endure than the great fatigue and the constant shelling of combat. Besides, everyone had a chance to visit Rome. There was Vatican City and audiences with Pope Pius XII. There were the shops of Rome and the beautiful churches rich with famous paintings, and villas and

gardens, the Coliseum, hotels, and the ruins of ancient Rome. A must with everyone was the Piazza Venezia where Romans had gathered, or in most cases had been ordered to gather, to hear Mussolini harangue them from a small balcony overhead. All the greats among the Fascists at one time or another appeared with Il Duce on this balcony. In addition, many high-ranking Germans found it inflated their egos to make a speech there. It was a favorite spot of Von Ribbentrop. The day Rome fell, an enterprising American soldier who spoke Italian, came out on the balcony and mimicked one of Il Duce's orations. The populace was hysterical. With Rome in Allied hands and with Mussolini in flight to northern Italy, it was somehow very satisfying for the Custermen to stand in the square, look up at the balcony, and just say, "Hummph!" The Victor Emanuel Monument which fronted one side of the Piazza Venezia, and which everyone called "The Wedding Cake," was a colossal, ornate structure of white marble, on whose roof were mounted two groups of huge iron horses. Rome was a city that one could visit again and again, each time with renewed interest. It was, therefore, with great reluctance that the Custermen finally departed from their Rome rest and training area.

The last five days of the training period before the Division moved north toward the front on 10 July 1944 had been devoted to special training in the technique of river crossing in battalion strength. The 310th Engineers provided instruction and demonstration for other troops. Stress was laid upon the loading of assault boats and support rafts, and the troops were familiarized with the capacities of the boats with respect to rifle, machine-gun and mortar squads, and their equipment. The infantry as well as the engineers continued to receive training in the clearing of minefields and neutralizing booby traps, especially in darkness. Other units of the Division continued individual programs of training, stressing the physical fitness of the troops and motor maintenance. All troops received training in the use of the gas mask and decontamination equipment.

On 8 July 1944 the Division was ordered to move 163 miles north of Rome to an assembly area near Roccastrada. On 10 July the movement began. During the 85th Division's well earned rest from combat, the rest of Fifth and Eighth Armies had pursued the Germans rapidly toward the Arno River and Florence. The Nazis made delaying stands where they could, but in general, the tide of the great offensive swept on unchecked. In the last few days, however, as the Allied forces closed on Florence, it had been noticed that enemy resistance had increased.

In the new Division area around Roccastrada and Rocca Tederighi,

the 85th began a training period in mountain warfare. Cooperation between infantry and supporting arms was stressed as well as the maintenance of supply and communications, including the use of Cub planes to pick up messages.

The 85th at this time was still under the control of II Corps, but on 16 July the Division was alerted for movement to the IV Corps area, which was on the left (coastal) sector of the Fifth Army front. On 16 July, also, the 339th Infantry and the 85th Reconnaissance Troop were ordered to the vicinity of Fognano, north of Volterra, and were placed in Fifth Army reserve. The reason for the latter move was the development of a gap between Fifth and Eighth Armies caused by the more rapid advance of Fifth Army. The 339th and the 85th Recon Troop, in a strategic position in army reserve, began at once to develop plans to meet any counterattack along the boundary between the two armies. The rest of the Division, on 18 July, moved to Rosignano Marittima, a few miles in from the Ligurian Coast below Leghorn (Livorno). The Division was on hand, but it was not needed in the attack which captured Leghorn and it soon became apparent that there were plans for the employment of the 85th farther east along the Arno River. Consequently, on 28 July, the Division assembled in an area between Volterra and San Gimignano, a medieval city which had once had seventy-three towers. In the meantime no counterattack had threatened in the sector watched by the 339th and the 85th Recon Troop, so these two units were not employed. They remained in the same area and the units of the Division were together again. Volterra is the world's alabaster center, and the 339th and the 85th Recon were particularly fortunate to be in the area at the time they were. The fighting troops had little time to stop for purchases as they went through, but these 85th Division troops were stationed there for many days. During that time they practically cleaned out all existing stocks of alabaster, which included attractive bookends, ash trays, and lamps. Many men spent most of their spare funds buying and shipping presents home.

On 17 July a significant development took place. The 328th, 329th, and 910th Field Artillery Battalions, now famed for their deadly and powerful fire, were equipped with two additional 105mm howitzers per battery. These units began training at once in the operation of a larger battery.

The 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion was attached to the Division on 29 July, moving at once to the Division assembly area. The 1st Battalion of the 19th Engineer Regiment was attached to the Division on 30 July, and on 31 July was attached to the 310th Engineer Bat-

talion. Also on 30 July, the 403d Field Artillery Battalion moved by II Corps order to the firing area of the 178th Field Artillery Group to which it was then attached. On arrival in the vicinity of Castelfiorentino it was placed in support of the 88th Division.

Fifth Army had plans for the use of the 85th Division in the extremely rugged, mountainous terrain north of Florence, when the proper time came. During the first two weeks of August 1944, therefore, the Custermen were given intensive training to equip them properly for the important future assignment. The troops took frequent, long marches and practiced scouting and patrolling. Instruction in the mechanics and the technique of river crossings was continued. The attached tank and tank destroyer units were included in special training which emphasized the use of their guns as supporting artillery. Men were familiarized with the development of a communications system in mountainous country and under conditions unfavorable for the use of vehicles. Division Artillery sent out Cub planes to pick up and deliver messages between the units of the Division. Training also was conducted in the use of pigeons in sending messages and in the use of mules to lay wire.

Fifth and Eighth Armies were now moving slowly closer to Florence and the Arno River. Headquarters of both armies had several plans under consideration for crossing the Arno. River-crossing training of the 85th Division was stepped up. On 2-3 August Companies A, B and C of the 310th Engineer Battalion, with two companies of the attached 1st Battalion, 19th Engineer Regiment, moved to the banks of the Elsa River south of Certaldo, where they practiced bridge construction for ten days. This river was fifty feet wide and from three to four feet deep. The engineers, working every day, built and dismantled foot bridges and treadway bridges. They also fashioned "flying ferries" of M-2 assault boats. The rest of the Division continued to occupy itself with river-crossing problems, and Division and unit commander prepared plans for crossing the Arno west of Signa, which was west of Florence. The general plan was to force a crossing of the river and drive northwest to take the Mount Albano hill mass and the high ground northwest of Pistoia. The Division Commander and his regimental, battalion, company and platoon commanders made an intensive study of the terrain and of the disposition of enemy troops. In addition, selected officers and NCOs accompanied Indian and New Zealand troops in their night patrols in the sector along the Arno where the Division was expected to cross. Patrols from the 17th and 21st Brigades of the Indian 8th Division and later from the 4th and 6th Brigades of the New Zealand 2d Division were each accompanied by three or four

officers and noncommissioned officers from the infantry regiments and the engineer, tank destroyer, and tank battalions. The patrols tried to learn where the enemy had sown his minefields and erected his barbed-wire barriers; they also sought to learn the condition of the roads and bridges and the locations of possible crossing sites. The approaches to the river were studied, as were the condition of the banks and the bed of the river. Each night, or in some cases on alternate nights, the American members of the patrols were rotated in order that as many men as possible might have first-hand knowledge of the terrain. The British units were ordered to prevent the enemy from learning that American forces were in this vicinity. It must be said that they carried out these instructions generously. The New Zealanders on patrol were especially aggressive and took every precaution to protect their American guests.

All these plans went for naught, however, except for the training and experience provided, when Army informed the Division that the original plans for the Division to cross the Arno in this sector would not go into effect.

On 10 August the 85th Division sent twelve Italian-speaking enlisted men into the sector of the New Zealand 2d Division to work with Field Security Service in restricting the movement of civilians in this heavily populated area. The New Zealand 2d Division already had a hundred men in the field engaged in this work. Included in the group were civilian police, Partisans, and *Carabinieri.* Later, when the 85th took over this entire area, these same Italian-speaking enlisted men and the *Carabinieri* were used to restrict the movement of the population.

The 85th was now ordered to take over a much larger sector along the Arno than it had been originally planned that it should have in a river-crossing operation. The Division's mission now was to continue the active defense of the Arno River line. On the night of 12-13 August, elements of the Division began to move forward out of the Volterra area to positions east of Castelfiorentino. On 12-13 and 13-14 August the 339th Infantry Regimental Combat Team moved forward and on 14 August was established in an area northeast of Montespertoli. On the 15th, the 339th completed the relief of the New Zealand 4th Armored Brigade and the 6th Infantry Brigade of the New Zealand 2d Infantry Division, and assumed responsibility for their sectors. The 339th RCT was the first unit of the Division to return to the line. The regiment was reinforced by Company C of the 776th TD Battalion, Company C of the 752d Tank Battalion, and Company A of the 84th Chemical Weapons Battalion. The 910th Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support northwest of Conigliolo.

The outpost line at the front in this sector varied between 200 and 1,500 yards south of the river. Along this extensive front the 339th Infantry sent out its first contact and reconnaissance patrols on 15 August 1944. In most cases there were several hundred yards between platoon outposts, and although enemy artillery fire was moderate, enemy patrols were very active.

On the night of 15-16 August the 338th Infantry relieved the New Zealand 5th Infantry Brigade. Attached at this time to the 338th were Company B of the 752d Tank Battalion, Company D of the 776th TD Battalion, and Company B of the 84th Chemical Weapons Battalion. In direct support was the 329th Field Artillery Battalion.

The front line now taken over by the 85th Division extended from a point near Bellosguardo on the east, westward passing south of Montelupo, and running west along the south bank of the Arno to Casone. From there it passed near Cortenuova to the vicinity of Empoli and then followed the bank of the Arno to the junction of that river with the Elsa. Control of these two sectors taken over by the 338th and 339th Infantry Regiment passed, on 16 August, to the Commanding General, 85th Division, from the CG of the New Zealand 2d Division.

The hill of Bellosguardo, the eastern flank of the 85th Division's new battle line, is the last spur of the southern hills which, at this point, rise almost from the river brink. It is a spot beautiful in itself and, moreover, memorable in the annals of science; for on it is the tower

> ". . . where Galileo stood at night
> to take the vision of the stars . . ."

From Bellosguardo could be seen the great city of Florence. As one looked across the fields planted with olive trees, against which the Italians trained their vines, he could see in the city itself a lofty, singularly designed tower with a high building below. This was the Palazzo Vecchio della Signoria, the government house of medieval Florence. Farther to the left was the great cathedral—the campanile of Giotto and the dome of Brunelleschi. There, within grasp, lay Florence, now under attack by the British forces of Eighth Army. Florence, with its Pitti Palace, famed for its glorious pictures; its museums with the treasures of Etruscan tombs; the beautiful Santa Croce with its rich chapels and tombs; and Santa Maria di Novella, a church of the Dominicans, with its cloisters adorned with frescos of Orcagna.

It is a remarkable fact that each of the capitals of the ancient states

of Italy has a character peculiarly its own. Paris, Marseille, Bordeaux—to take cities of corresponding position in a district of equal size—though each has its distinctive features, all have very much in common. It is not so with the cities of Italy. Each is in a way unique, totally dissimilar from its former rivals, its present fellows. Genoa and Venice are alike only in being seaports. Naples differs in almost every respect from both. Rome and Florence are both built on banks of rivers, and when this is said the comparison ends. Rome is essentially classic, full of the relics of the Roman Empire and the magnificence of the Renaissance, in the city of the Medici—yet its most characteristic features and its most glorious works belong to the days when the treasures of the ancients had not yet been unrolled.

Colonel Hughes' men now moved up, and on 17 August 1944 the 337th RCT relieved the 363d Infantry of the U.S. 91st Division, taking over a sector of front line running generally parallel to the Arno and extending from the Elsa River west to Capanne. This sector also passed to the control of the Commanding General, 85th Division. The Custer Division's sector, extending east from Capanne to a point near Bellosguardo, now covered an airline distance of nineteen miles, and a ground distance of twenty-four miles along the river. All three regiments were committed and the Division aggressively pursued its mission of the active defense of this sector of the Arno River line. The Division had to have a reserve force, however, so General Coulter called upon the 310th Engineer Battalion (minus the platoons that were attached to the infantry regiments) to be Division reserve. The engineers moved up to the vicinity of Montegufoni for this purpose. Division strength was further augmented by the attachment, on 17 August, of the 178th Field Artillery Battalion.

About this time a new American division arrived in Italy and joined Fifth Army. It was the 92d Infantry Division, and it was assigned to IV Corps. In order to give some of its men combat experience, the 92d sent groups of officers and enlisted men to the 85th Division, where they were attached to the 337th Infantry, the 328th Field Artillery Battalion, the 310th Engineers, the 310th Medical Battalion, the 85th Quartermaster Company, the 85th Signal Company, and the 785th Ordnance Company.

Most of the 85th's front line at this time was not the Arno River itself, but a series of outposts and strongpoints south of the river. These positions were widely separated and the enemy constantly infiltrated with his patrols, especially at night, and frequently raided the flanks

and even the rear of company areas. Enemy forces opposing the Division during this period included elements of the 26th Panzer Division, the 3d Panzergrenadier Division, and the 362d Infantry Division. These units held some strongpoints south of the Arno, notably at La Lisca, Fornaci, and Tinaja, but the main body of German troops was on the north bank. The terrain north of the river was very picturesque, with good vegetation on the lower slopes of the hills which rose sharply a short distance north of the river bank. The Nazis, as usual, were up in the high ground from which they had excellent observation of the country to the south. This period of action by the 85th was marked by aggressive patrolling by the infantry and counterbattery, harassing, and observed fire by Division Artillery. The Division's supply routes were under constant observation, which necessitated moving most of the traffic at night.

From German prisoners taken by our patrols, it was learned that the enemy planned to withdraw in the event of an all-out offensive, but that otherwise he would hold his ground, resist the Division's patrolling and harass its positions. The enemy was active and bold in his patrol operations in an effort to learn whether and when the attack would come. In one German raid on outpost positions the enemy surprised and captured a whole squad. Enemy groups also crossed the river to lay mines and to set trip flares.

The 85th now increased its own patrolling west of Montelupo. Strong patrols crossed the Arno searching for enemy positions and seeking to learn the strength of enemy units. Mines were laid on the south side of the river and trip flares set to hinder the enemy in his patrol action.

The Division already held a front as wide as any ever held by a Fifth Army unit, but on 20 August even this overextended defense line was widened. Army desired to relieve elements of the British 1st Division occupying the sector on the right of the 339th Infantry. The 85th Reconnaissance Troop was, therefore, detached from the 337th and sent forward to relieve the left half of the British line. In addition, the 310th Engineer Battalion (minus some of its units) moved to the extreme right boundary, where it relieved elements of the King's Dragoon Guards. Both the Recon Troop and the engineers were attached to the 339th Infantry.

General Clark now saw that the time was drawing near for the employment of the 85th Division in the great offensive that would be necessary to smash the German positions in the Gothic Line north of Florence, to which the enemy was slowly falling back. He therefore ordered the Division out of the Arno River defense line in order that

it might get some rest before the major action that lay ahead. The Division was relieved on 26 August by the South African 6th Armoured Division and elements of the U.S. 1st Armored Division, and moved south to assembly areas between Montespertoli and Certaldo, on the slopes of the ridge separating the Elsa and Pesa River Valleys. Here, after a two-day rest, the 85th plunged at once into a vigorous training period in mountain warfare. The weather was warm and pleasant and more conducive to lolling about under the shade of cool, green poplar trees than laboring and sweating in preparation for more hard fighting. For the 85th was now bivouacked in the beautiful countryside of mid-Tuscany, the land of flowers. In Tuscany could be found flowers that grew by the sea; flowers of the marshlands; sub-tropical plants and flowers generally peculiar to the Alpine regions; wild flowers and carefully cultivated flowers of all descriptions. Here in the heart of one of the most beautiful parts of Italy were also tall pine and silver-shaded olive groves, beautiful elder trees and dark green poplars. The fields were green and warm and pleasant, for Tuscany has always been a land of pleasant climate, great variety of vegetation, and of great natural beauty.

In addition to the warmth of the weather and the attractiveness of the surrounding countryside, there was another factor that, dangerously, inclined the Custermen to leisure rather than renewed effort. The "Second Front," launched only two days after Fifth Army's troops first entered Rome and in the full flush of Allied elation over the magnificent victory that came with the liberation of the Eternal City, had been most successful. On 14 August 1944, while the 85th was preparing to move into the Arno River line, the German Seventh Army in France had begun its full retreat to the east, toward Paris. General Eisenhower had addressed an Order of the Day to his troops:

". . . Through your combined skill and fortitude you have created an opportunity for a notable victory in France. Because the victory we can now achieve is fleeting, the opportunity can be grasped only by great zeal and force on the part of all troops. I . . . request every soldier to go forward to his objective with the confidence that the enemy can survive only by surrender. This week may be a momentous one in the history of the war and a fateful one for the ambitions of the Nazi tyrants."

The German Army in France faced complete disaster. In full retreat, the Nazis were trying to escape to the east along the one remaining east-west road not yet cut by Allied forces. German losses in transport were tremendous as they tried to squirm out of the trap, by day as well as by night, entirely without air cover. The vaunted Luftwaffe had

failed to show up in the darkest hour of the German forces in Western France. German reserves, coming up from the Paris area, approached the front on bicycles. As they neared the battle area they met an endless flow of beaten Germans going toward the rear. These "motorized" reserves, a poor substitute for the Nazi mechanized armies that had roared down the roads of France in 1940, had to fight their way through their fleeing comrades to take up a hopeless cause.

On 14 August 1944 the *New York Times* said that Germany was now in a far worse situation than she had been in September of 1918, when her cause was recognized to have been hopeless. At that time Russia had been knocked out of World War I and Germany was fighting on only one front. "Today," the *Times* said, "she fights on five fronts, internal, aerial, west, south, and east. Defeat is now recognized to be certain by all but fanatics."

On 15 August, swarming ashore over the former playground of millionaires, the French Riviera, Allied troops were consolidating initial beach positions and were pushing deep into the coastal hills of Southern France. Liberty ships were unloading near the harbor of Cannes and landings were reported twenty-five miles east of Toulon. Thousands of American, British and French troops, tanks, and guns were already ashore and up to a late hour German opposition continued to be scattered. This was an operation of the Mediterranean Theater, under command of Field Marshal Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, and much of the strength of both Fifth and Eighth Armies had been taken to implement its power. The 442d RCT (Americans of Japanese ancestry), the 3d, 36th and 45th Infantry Divisions, and many special units, together with most of its 240mm guns, were Fifth Army's contribution to this new blow against the Germans. This new offensive was part four of the vast design of strategy to defeat Germany planned at the Teheran Conference. On 11 May 1944, in Italy, General Alexander's forces had launched the great blow that signaled the opening of the giant summer campaign. Three weeks later, General Eisenhower had given the order that opened the "Second Front," in Normandy. On 23 June Marshal Stalin had sent his huge Russian armies into battle, opening the summer offensive on the Eastern Front. Now, the fourth blow, a powerful new assault from the south, was in full swing. The invasion of Southern France was an enormous offensive on land, sea, and air, coordinated with the powerful blows in Central and Western France, all closely integrated with the increased activity of the French Forces of the Interior. Inside Germany, the Nazi commentator, General Dittmar, made the observation that the blows of the Allies in the east, west and south, closely coordinated, were going according to plan.

The Nazis were now witnessing the fruits of the Teheran Conference. They had seen their U-boats swept from the seas; the Luftwaffe all but wiped from the skies; their war plants being regularly blown to bits; and the German armies on land being systematically destroyed.

18 August 1944. "American Armor 30 Miles from Paris." The French people were in arms. All over France, patriots were mobilized. The Germans were frantically issuing decrees, but the French no longer heeded them because the Nazis lacked the power to enforce them. They were too busy fighting for their lives to make Frenchmen work for them. Events were moving rapidly. In the east, the Red Army, near East Prussia, stood ready to sweep onto German soil. A Soviet commander had sent a message to the victorious commanders on the Western Front: "We will meet you in Berlin." One of Hitler's satellites announced she wanted to get out of Germany's war. Hitler's New Order in Europe, which was to last a thousand years, was in the process of being broken up.

21 August 1944. "Rioting in Paris." "Fierce Fighting East and Northeast of Warsaw." "Fifth Army Patrol Action Intensified."

22 August 1944. General Montgomery, commander of Allied ground forces in France, speaking to his men said: "The end of the war is in sight. The German Army in France has been soundly defeated. Let us finish off this business in record time."

23 August 1944. "Russians Smash into Rumania." The Balkan sector of the Red Army front, idle for over four months, flared up as large Soviet forces launched a two-pronged drive into Rumania.

25 August 1944. "Rumania Quits." Michael, 23-year-old King of Rumania, announced his country's capitulation. General Patton was reported sixty miles southeast of Paris. The war did not, on the surface, appear to have long to run. The surrender of Rumania meant that Hilter's plans for a system of European domination had collapsed like a house of cards. Before Hitler began his war of conquest he realized that he must have the Balkan states with him to protect Germany's most vulnerable flank. He needed to whip into line Central and Southeastern Europe. So he annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia. Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria became his satellie nations. At first he used their troops and their facilities for the attack on Russia, but Stalingrad and El Alamein put a halt to his eastward drive. Then he needed the Balkan nations for the defense of Fortress Europe. Now Rumania, keystone of the whole Balkan defense, had fallen. What of Bulgaria? She had no choice but to get out. On 27 August, the Bulgars announced that they were disarming German troops withdrawing through Bulgaria from Rumania.

Five countries that Germany had used and planned to use for all time as a slave market were now either out from under the Nazi heel or on their way out. They were Italy, France, Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria. In the Nazi scheme of things these nations were to be plundered of their food and resources to serve the needs of the Third Reich. In addition, they were to serve as shock absorbers, buffer states between the Nazis and the Allied nations. Now, not only were these countries lost to Germany, but they were all taking active measures against her.

On 1 September 1944 the Allied armies were beyond Paris and driving hard toward the Rhine. The picture then was quite different from the one five years previous. Five years before, on the orders of Hitler, Germany invaded Poland to begin World War II. A glance at the successive anniversaries revealed the decline of German aggression in Europe. By 1 September 1940 Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and France had been overrun. Britain was alone. On 1 September 1941 the Nazis were near Leningrad; Yugoslavia and Greece had been conquered. The Nazi triumph was at high tide on 1 September 1942. Cairo, Suez and the Caucasus would be a matter of time. But by 1 September 1943 the Soviet armies had hurled back the invaders. The German armies in North Africa had been defeated. Now, 1 September 1944, at the start of the sixth year of World War II, the Allied armies were engaged in whirlwind offensives. The Germans were reeling back in defeat. Three of the great capitals of Europe were free—Rome, Paris and Bucharest. For freedom-loving people who had drunk to the dregs the bitter cup of despair in the dark and trying hours of German ascendancy in Europe, there now loomed bright and golden on the horizon the vision of the enormous disintegration of the German Army merging into final collapse.

This vision of the end of the war was the chief topic of interest to the men of the 85th Division as they began their period of mountain training in preparation for their next offensive—an offensive that, from a look at the news of the day, might never have to be launched. The point was argued hotly among the men during their free time and during regular orientation forums. The majority felt that although the war was going well, more hard fighting should be expected. They argued that few people could say when the war was likely to end. Nor could anyone say how much of a fight Germans would put up when their country was invaded. One thing was certain: the real Nazis would keep the war going as long as they could. They had nothing to gain by surrender. They had nothing to lose by fighting on, for they knew that three choices faced them: death in battle, death by suicide, or death by

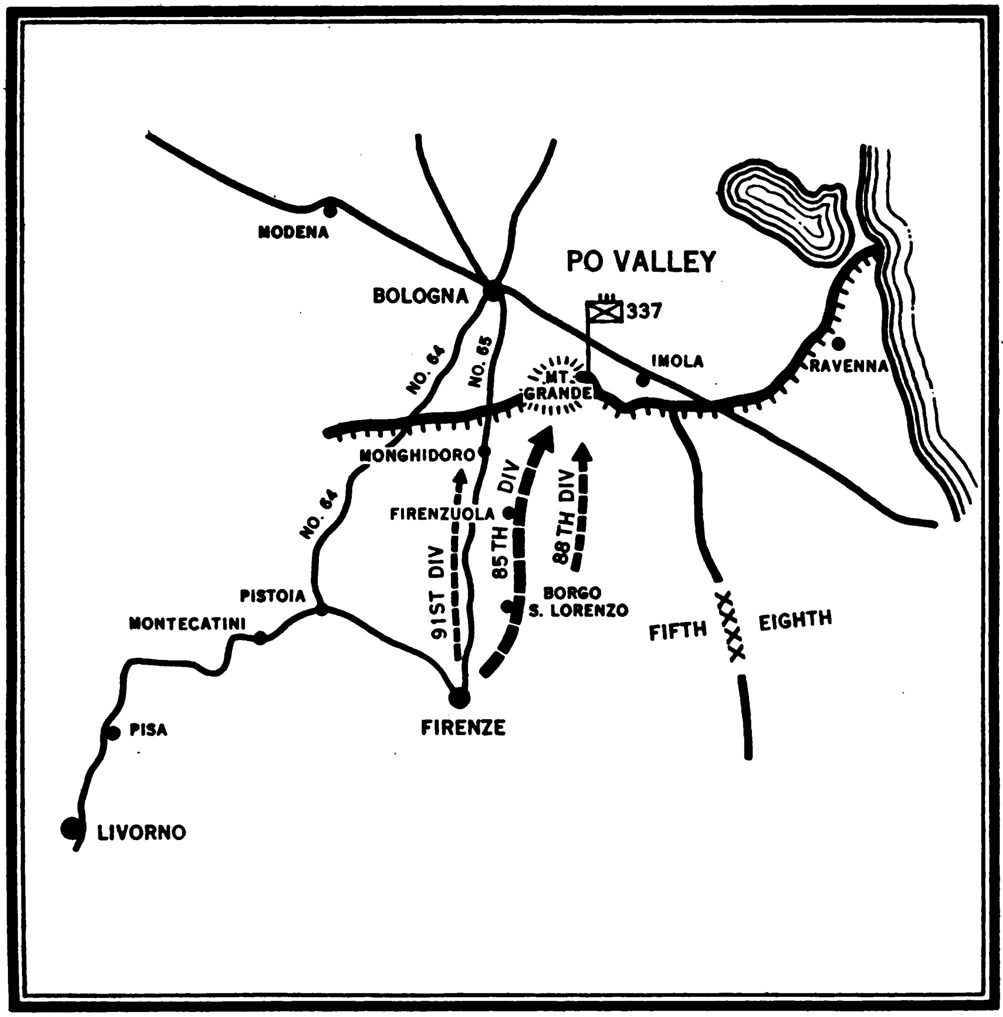
the hangman's rope. If they thought they could salvage nothing out of this war and had no hope of fighting a third war, they might decide to go on down fighting, carrying as much as they could with them and wallowing in the blood bath to the last bitter minute. The Custermen felt, then, that it would be better to train with all their concentration and attention now and be prepared in case the fight went on than to relax and go into the next offensive out of condition. It was in this frame of mind that the 85th Division intensified its training and prepared to assault one of the toughest German defense positions in all of Europe—the Gothic Line.

Following the great Allied victory south of Rome, which had reached its climax in the liberation of the Eternal City, the Germans had no immediate natural defense line in which to entrench themselves and prolong their war. They were forced to fall back, fighting what delaying actions they could, along the entire breadth of Italy. Close on their heels all the way and hammering them unceasingly were the Fifth and the Eighth Armies. The next natural barrier to the Allied advance was the Arno River, and the Nazis sought to use it to their advantage. However, chiefly through the Eighth Army offensive which captured Florence, the Arno River line was forced and the enemy compelled to fall back to the first major mountain defense line north of Rome, the Gothic Line, which extended from roughly north of Pisa to Rimini, on the Adriatic. For more than a year now *Organisation Todt* had been constructing powerful defense positions in the rocks and crags and in the gullies, draws, and hillsides of the steep, rugged Apennines. When the Gustav Line was smashed, work on the Gothic Line was speeded up, and now, as Generals Clark and McCreery marshalled their forces before it, it presented a stupendous obstacle of towering, formidable defenses. In the wild, barren mountain country of the North Apennines between Florence and Bologna were two great ridges, or watersheds, running the breadth of Italy more or less at right angles to the Allied advance toward the Reich from the south. The first of these, some twenty-five to twenty-eight miles north of Florence, was the Gothic Line. The other lay about twenty miles to the north of this line and would also have to be taken before any thought of smashing into the Po Valley could be entertained. The mountain peaks in these ridges varied from three thousand to five thousand feet, and access to them was over poor roads and trails which, as they gained altitude, narrowed to mere goat paths and finally vanished in the scrub growth and ragged rock near the mountain top. Only here and there along the narrow trails in this vast mountain wilderness was to be found a solitary stone farm-

house. Some of the mountain tops, without vegetation and completely uninhabited, even by animals, were among the most barren, forbidding, and desolate spots on earth. Yet it was in these very places, as well as farther down the slopes, that the Germans erected their defenses, for the high rugged terrain offered tremendous defensive advantages. The mere scaling of these mountains in ages past had presented serious obstacles to physically active and agile mountain climbers. Now, with every trail and path—every conceivable approach to impassable, precipitous cliffs—covered by German rifle, machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire, it was easy to visualize the tremendous difficulties that would have to be overcome before the Gothic Line could be successfully penetrated. From their positions, the Germans had the advantage of observation, not only over the routes of approach to the base of the mountains, but over every tiresome, treacherous foot of the way up the slopes. The Germans were dug deep into the mountain sides, as only the Germans, who had felt the full weight of Allied artillery and aerial bombardment in previous engagements, could dig. Enemy bunkers on the forward slopes were dug twenty to thirty feet into the ground and the solid rock. They were covered with huge piles of enormous logs and boulders and from their secure interiors, German machine gunners could fire through narrow slits opening through rocks or fallen trees. None of these bunkers could be reduced by artillery fire except in the case of a direct hit. They could be taken only by aggressive, persistent, and skillful infantry action. Everywhere he could, the enemy laid barbed wire and along its length zeroed in his mortars and machine guns.

It was now early September 1944, and a coordinated attack against the Gothic Line by Fifth and Eighth Armies was imminent. General Alexander's plan was to deal a double punch with Eighth Army on the eastern half of the line and Fifth Army on the western half. In the zone of Fifth Army, General Clark ordered II Corps to make the main effort on the right flank. The 85th Division, when it joined the offensive, was to make the main effort for Corps on the Corps' right flank. General Clark was counting on the hard-hitting, battle-toughened Custer Division, which had so surprisingly and completely smashed through the Gustav Line, to break the Gothic Line.

The task before the 85th was to pierce the Gothic Line in its sector, breaking through that part of the line defending Il Giogo Pass, through which wound the only first-class road to the north in the Division's zone of advance. This road was first-class only by comparison with the paths and trails which flanked it. The two main roads from Florence to Bologna, Highways 64 and 65, were west of the Division's sector.



Map 9: The attack across the North Apennines. (Scale 1 inch=23 miles)

Mount Altuzzo and the hill to the west, Monticelli, commanded this road through Il Giogo Pass, leading to Firenzuola. Mount Verruca, to the east, an equally dominant feature, was a major obstacle to the advance of the Division and a threat to the right flank of the forces attempting to capture Altuzzo. As General Coulter studied his maps it became clear to him that the capture of these two hill masses would break the Gothic Line. But it was also clear that the task was an enormous one. Both Altuzzo and Verruca rose steeply to nearly three thousand feet. There were comparatively few trees on Altuzzo, but parts of Verruca were heavily wooded with pine and chestnut trees. In many places, both hills fell off in sheer cliffs. The fields leading to the Altuzzo mass were inclosed on three sides in a sort of natural amphitheater. Troops moving into this area or along the trees which bordered the fields could be seen from two and sometimes three sides.

The ridge which led to the southern crest (Hill 926) included three hills—578, 624 and 782. Beyond this crest there were three other high points which would have to be seized before the hill mass could be considered to have been wrested from the enemy. The terrain of the Verruca mass was similar. Here also there were three hills—591, 732 and 724—that made up a ridge that lay in the path of the advance to the summit, Hill 930.

The great triumph of General Alexander's armies in the 1944 summer offensive had run its course. The enemy's flight to the north had halted. Time, the terrain, reinforcements from other fronts, and the lengthening of Allied supply lines had given Marshal Kesselring the opportunity to organize his forces to resist further advances of Fifth and Eighth Armies. Now, high up in their mountain strongholds, protected by logs, mounds of earth, slabs of stone, and poured concrete, entrenched in their pillboxes, bunkers, and machine-gun nests, the Germans waited for the blow to fall.

The 85th Division, meanwhile, in order to keep in condition its seasoned veterans, to bring up to Division standards its recent replacements, and to perfect the necessary teamwork for a successful breach of the Gothic Line, was winding up an intensive training period. Mountain training, physical conditioning, and infantry-tank training, were given equal attention. The atmosphere was tense with the expectation of the coming assault. General Coulter called his officers together and sketched the outlines of the general plan. He praised the work of officers and men in the Rome offensive and stressed the importance of the mission which the army commander had now assigned to the 85th Division. "We are to make the main effort for Fifth Army," General Coulter said. "The army commander has the greatest confidence in our ability to succeed in the vital job that lies ahead, and we cannot let him down. The aggressiveness and leadership of officers and noncommissioned officers will do much to inspire the Division onward, to break the Gothic Line, and pursue the enemy northward."

Orders were issued by II Corps, instructing the 85th Division to start its movement toward the Gothic Line at 1900 hours on 11 September. The 85th Division Artillery moved up in daylight before the general movement hour into forward assembly areas north of Vaglia, about twenty miles northeast of Florence. At 1900 hours movement to Vaglia assembly areas by the rest of the Division began, with the 339th Infantry moving first. Moving on a 24-hour schedule, the last combat unit of the Division (337th Infantry) closed into the assembly area at 1900 hours, 12 September 1944. In the new location, the Division promptly received added strength. The 84th Chemical Weapons

Battalion and the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion were attached for operations.

On the night of 11 September, guides from the 338th and 339th Infantry Regiments had been sent forward preparatory to the passage of these units through the 363d Infantry (91st Division) prior to H-hour on 13 September. On the night of 12-13 September, the 338th Infantry and the 339th Infantry moved to forward assembly areas east of Scarperia. These units were now in the pleasant fields and meadows that soon merged into the steeply rising slopes of the Gothic Line. Here in the attractive valley, cool, luxurious, pleasantly gardened villas were to be found. The 338th's headquarters was set up in one; the 339th's headquarters found another, with dark brown, fine, wood-panelled walls and rich leather upholstery; in still another was the 66th Infantry Brigade of the British 1st Division, on the right flank of the 339th. The 339th's villa contained a magnificent library, which was at once placed off limits because of the rare and beautifully bound volumes, formerly used by the Swiss Embassy which had occupied the villa. The British in their villa found a massive solid-oak pool table, complete with green felt top, cues, and balls. This was not off limits, but few persons had a chance to enjoy it. British Tommies were moving up in single file along the narrow roads and trails toward the front for their attack on Mount Prefetto, on the right flank of the 339th's objective, Mount Verruca. Along with them were large numbers of mules loaded with rations and ammunition. The Tommies carried packs on their backs and had their rifles slung. Some of them were veterans of Libya, Tunisia, and Southern Italy. Others were recent replacements. Some of them plodded forward grim and glum, with a tired step, as though they were thoroughly sick of war. Others, more philosophical, were jaunty and jested about the law of averages as they went on toward, perhaps, their fifth major battle.

The Custermen were also moving up, fully equipped and with the usual quota of ubiquitous mules. Company after company, in single file on each side of the trails, advanced toward the Gothic Line up the now steeply rising hills. It would be unfair and untrue to say that the men went up to the front impatiently or eagerly. There was not a soldier there who would have been the least bit disappointed if the war were to end in five minutes. They had families, sweethearts, wives, and children back home, and every man wanted to live to return to see them. They had faced death many times and now, somehow, life seemed richer and fairer than it had ever been. To men who have stood on the brink of death, everything in the world of the living assumes a greater vividness, a greater beauty. Men who have had narrow escapes from

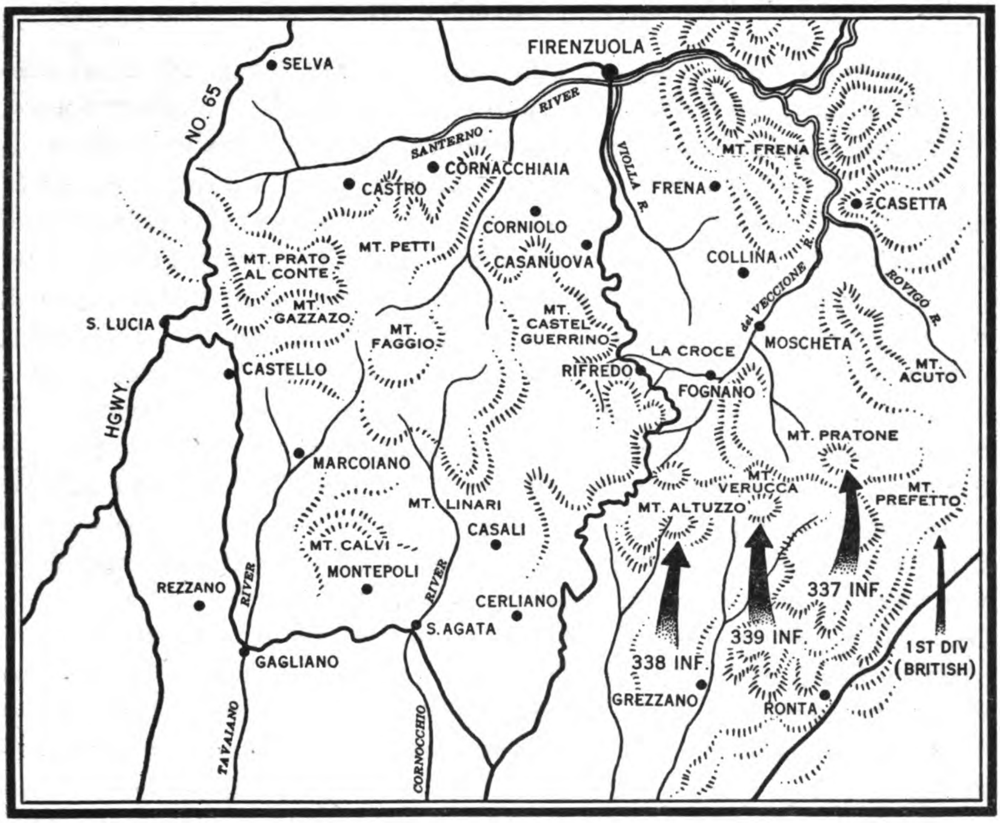
death by mines, machine-gun and rifle bullets, mortar and artillery shells, and aerial bombs find a keener tone in music, a brighter color in the fields and forests and in the sky.

They were, however, *ready* to fight. Moreover, they were confident—confident in their skill at arms, in their knowledge of tactics, in their understanding of the enemy's methods of fighting; confident in the completeness of their training, in the quality of their weapons and equipment, and in the speed and efficiency of their supply organizations; confident in the power and accuracy and speed of their supporting artillery and in the spirit of teamwork that had developed their Division into the magnificent fighting machine that it was; and above all, confident in the complete justice of the cause for which they now walked forward toward the menacing guns of the enemy, prepared to sacrifice their lives. At 0600 hours on 13 September, the 85th Division attacked the Gothic Line.

The 338th and 339th Infantry Regiments were on line, each with two battalions abreast. The 338th, on the left, struck out toward Altuzzo, and the 339th, on the right, headed for Verruca. The attack was preceded, in the early morning hours, by a tremendous artillery barrage laid upon the enemy positions by Division Artillery and the II Corps artillery units supporting the 85th. The barrage was not concentrated in such a short period as the one which had opened the drive on Rome, but the total number of rounds fired was much greater. Supporting aviation also bombarded enemy positions in the Gothic Line and, in addition, bombed and strafed the enemy's supply lines and depots.

Colonel William H. Mikkelsen, a young, vigorous officer, had been in command of the 338th Infantry since shortly after its initial attack on the Gustav Line in May 1944. He proved himself to be an able regimental commander throughout the entire campaign.

The Division soon found itself squarely up against the well prepared positions of the Gothic Line. Colonel Mikkelsen's 338th Infantry advanced methodically with its 1st Battalion attacking on the left in column of companies and its 2d Battalion on the right with two companies abreast. The entire regimental attacking force was met almost immediately by a hail of enemy fire. Intense mortar barrages and small-arms fire pounded the 338th and increased in intensity as the day wore on. The 1st Battalion, nevertheless, moved from positions south of La Rocca and attacked toward Hill 926. By nightfall, after



Map 10: The Custer Division's assault against the Gothic Line. (Scale 1:108,000)

a day of violent exchange of fire on both sides, it had secured positions near Hill 926. During the night two companies pushed forward along the east and southeast slopes. The 2d Battalion also had a day of bitter fighting and, like the 1st Battalion, was able to make only a little progress.

Colonel Brady's men of the 339th Infantry also ran into serious trouble. With the 1st Battalion on the left and the 2d Battalion on the right, they had pushed on toward Verruca, moving up Hill 617 and the Poggio Rotto ridge. The objective was Hill 732, the most strongly fortified point on the Verruca mass, but they found their advance was quickly blocked by very heavy enemy artillery concentrations, mortar barrages, and grazing machine-gun fire. This fire was so intense that the men had no chance to improve positions won initially. Hill 591 blocked the way to Hill 732, and on 591 were three strongly fortified houses. From these, heavily manned, the enemy was firing upon the 339th men as they tried to move forward. Moving over rough open ground, dropping behind bushes and rocks and into holes and crevices, the Polar Bears tried to gain ground. But the enemy still had the advantage of height, observation, and permanent defense positions.

Colonel Brady ordered up the guns of the supporting 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion and they began hammering away at the fortified houses. All during that day and most of the night the attack at this point went on, with the enemy's resistance being gradually worn down. One company of the 2d Battalion succeeded in coming within 150 yards of the Verruca crest but it was not certain that it could long remain there.

The first day of the offensive had turned out to be a day of hard, bitter fighting. The Custermen had expected the enemy to be stubborn and to put up a strong fight, and he was living up to expectations a hundred per cent. The first day's fighting had its value, however. It pointed up the many difficulties of the attack and gave some idea of how the Germans might eventually be overcome. The key to the success of the offensive appeared now to be constant hammering and pounding of the enemy until, under the sheer weight of combined force and skill, he would be overwhelmed. The infantrymen dug in for the night and the artillerymen picked up the tempo of the offensive all during the night by firing heavy concentrations on the enemy's supply dumps, his routes of ration and ammunition supply, and his fortifications in the Gothic Line discovered by the infantrymen and the artillery observers during the day. Just before dawn the artillery's firing swelled into another tremendous barrage and once again the infantry jumped off.

The enemy immediately countered by fire from the southeast slopes of Monticelli, from the crest and ridge of Altuzzo, and from the southwest slopes of Verruca. This time, however, the 338th made better progress. Company B, advancing over barren, rocky terrain, spearheaded the attack. The company's route of approach was covered by intense flanking fire from snipers and automatic weapons, mortar fire, mines, and barbed-wire entanglements, but the men refused to be halted or turned back by the enemy's fierce resistance. Overcoming these obstacles and suffering heavy casualties, Company B pushed steadily on and finally moved up the exposed western ridge of Mount Altuzzo and seized the peak of this ridge, reaching a point within seventy-five yards of the crest of Altuzzo. Company E of the 2d Battalion tied in with the left of Company B to keep abreast of the advance. The newly won positions were not to be easily held, however. The Germans, realizing the grave danger to their whole Gothic Line position posed by this determined thrust of the 338th Infantry, swiftly reorganized their forces preparatory to launching a vicious counterattack. The Custermen, however, although near complete exhaustion from the fight, knew what was coming and they quickly set about preparing for the worst. They dug in and consolidated their positions, and waited for the enemy to strike. Promptly on schedule, the Germans launched the

first of four counterattacks, supported by a rolling artillery barrage. They attempted to overrun Company B's positions in a fanatical grenade-throwing charge, supported by automatic weapons and sniper fire from adjacent ridges. The men of Company B held their ground, however, and hurled back at the attackers a heavy volume of devastating, accurate fire. The Germans suffered very heavy casualties and were forced to withdraw. The Custermen were determined to hold their gains in spite of the fact that the supply of ammunition was dwindling and the number of Company B casualties was mounting. The Germans, however, were not giving up either. They attacked again and again in two more heavy determined counterattacks. Company B would not budge. Both attacks were repulsed with heavy losses and the enemy fell back to reorganize for the next assault. It was now seen that Company B's casualties had been severe. All officers and noncommissioned officers of the 2d and 3d Platoons of Company B had become casualties. Both platoons had been reduced to a total fighting strength of twenty men. The outlook was black. But at this point Staff Sgt. George D. Keathley took over. Keathley was guide of the 1st Platoon, but realizing that the other two platoons were without leadership, he moved up and assumed command of both platoons. The remnants of these two platoons were dangerously low on ammunition. Keathley, under intense enemy sniper and mortar fire, crawled about the ridge from one casualty to another collecting their ammunition and administering first aid. He then made his way back to the firing positions from which the men were preparing to repel the next blow. He visited each man of the two platoons, issuing the precious ammunition he had collected from the dead and wounded.

Following a heavy mortar barrage, three German infantry companies launched their fourth and most violent counterattack. So strong was the enemy blow that Company B was given up for lost. But Company B did not give up. So furious was the Germans' overwhelming charge that it overran thirteen of the forward riflemen, but the remaining men succeeded in weakening the force of the assault to limit the penetration. The remnants of the 2d and 3d Platoons were now looking to Sergeant Keathley for leadership. He shouted his orders precisely and with determination and the men responded. Time after time, the enemy tried to drive a wedge into Keathley's position, and each time they were driven back, suffering huge casualties. Suddenly an enemy hand grenade hit and exploded near Keathley, inflicting a mortal wound in his left side, but he would not be silenced. He fought on, holding his entrails in with his left hand. Finally he rose to his feet. Taking his left hand away from his wound and using it to steady his rifle, he fired at and

killed an attacking enemy soldier and continued shouting orders to his men. His heroic and intrepid action so inspired his men that they fought with incomparable determination and viciousness. For fifteen minutes Keathley continued leading his men and effectively firing his rifle. By now the aid of the 85th Division Artillery had been obtained and hundreds of rounds fell in the midst of the enemy troops, only fifty yards away. Keathley could have sought a sheltered spot and perhaps saved his life, but instead he elected to set an example for his men and make every possible effort to hold his position. Finally, under the weight of the artillery barrage the enemy withdrew, leaving behind many of their number either dead or seriously wounded. A few moments later, Sergeant Keathley died.

The posthumous citation awarding Sergeant Keathley the Medal of Honor said: ". . . Had it not been for his indomitable courage and incomparable heroism, the remnants of three rifle platoons of Company B might well have been annihilated by the overwhelming enemy attacking force. His actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service."

The entire 338th Infantry Regiment was also cited by the War Department for its magnificent inspiring fight. The citation awarding the regiment the Distinguished Unit Badge reads as follows:

"The 338th Infantry Regiment, 85th Infantry Division, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy from 13 to 18 September 1944 in overcoming the German defenses on Mount Altuzzo, the key point of the Gothic Line in the division sector. Spearheading the penetration of this formidable barrier, the 338th Infantry Regiment waged a bitter hill-to-hill struggle against an enemy stubbornly defending and counterattacking again and again. This hard-fought, grim, and bloody operation, culminating in capture of Mount Altuzzo, and the stern determination of the 338th Infantry Regiment to hold this objective against powerful and fanatical counterattacks were outstanding contributions to the break-through of the Gothic Line, setting the stage for the final defeat of the Axis forces in Italy. By its actions in gaining its vital objective against the bitterly resisting enemy, the 338th Infantry Regiment, 85th Infantry Division, displayed heroism, determination, and teamwork in keeping with the highest traditions of the Army of the United States."

While the 338th was battling fiercely to gain a few yards in its drive for Altuzzo, on its right flank the 339th Infantry was slugging away at similar heavy resistance. Shortly after they started out in the morning

on their advance on Hill 732, the 1st and 2d Battalions were halted by fire from the enemy on the Signorini hill mass. A sharp fight followed in which the enemy force was driven from these positions, but the advancing troops now found their progress again slowed, this time by wire barriers which surrounded the hill. The cliffs were sheer at this point and it was difficult to see how the Germans had managed to lay the barbed wire in the first place, let alone see how it was going to be removed under enemy observation. The Germans had placed it there very much like the men, in big cities, who erect the barbed wire designed to keep the public from industrial reservations. A small boy trying to cross such a reservation would have to climb up the high vertical fence and then work his way up overhead and back toward his rear in order to get up into and over the wire. In like manner, any individual Custerman who tried to get through the barbed wire under cover of darkness would face a similar back-breaking climb. The usual way to get through barbed-wire entanglements, of course, was to blast a path through them with bangalore torpedos, or batter them down with tanks, or throw chicken wire over them. But tanks could not maneuver on this ground. To attack the wire in daylight would call down a hail of fire, and to tackle it at night would involve the risk of being caught in heavy enemy barrages, since the Germans had all guns zeroed in along the wire entanglement. In addition to the obstacle of the wire, the 339th was further hampered by fire from its right rear. The British 1st Division had likewise run into severe resistance and had been unable to advance sufficiently to cover the 339th's right flank. The British, however, launched a strong attack that afternoon in an effort to bring themselves abreast of the Americans. At 2200 hours that night a tremendous artillery barrage was directed against hill 732 in preparation for another attack at midnight. At 2400 hours the 339th, with elements of all three battalions on line, resumed the offensive. The new attack made little headway, however, for the enemy still continued to effectively command the approaches to his positions. Nevertheless, one company of the 3d Battalion succeeded in reaching the saddle between Hills 732 and 724, but the 2d Battalion could still make no headway in the draws leading to Poggio Rotto and Signorini. When the 3d Battalion launched still another attack on the morning of the 15th, toward Hill 732, it was again repulsed.

Not only were there obstacles of small-arms fire, barbed wire, and mortar and artillery fire; there were also mines. Capt. Luther Carroll, commander of Company B, 339th, one of the most aggressive and best-liked company commanders in the Division, ran afoul of these. On the 14th, during the course of the 1st Battalion's advance, Carroll's 1st

Platoon was halted by an extensive minefield, which the enemy now covered by a hail of intense small-arms fire. Carroll, a fearless leader of men, ever impatient of delay in accomplishment of objectives assigned to him, was farther back with his company command group at the time. He immediately started forward to get his company moving again. Describing his actions, the citation in which he was awarded, posthumously, the Silver Star, states: ". . . Captain Carroll, a rifle company commander, moved through a hail of machine-gun fire to the leading platoon and moved out forward for a personal reconnaissance. While working his way through the minefields in an effort to find a route of advance, he was killed. But, even in death, Captain Carroll accomplished his mission in that he forced the enemy to disclose their strongpoints and methods of defense, which enabled the battalion to later break through the enemy line. This sheer display of courage and fortitude was an inspiration to his men and reflects great credit upon himself and the military service."

Carroll was a product of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Himself a native of Ellijay, Georgia, he was one of the first officers, a second lieutenant, to be assigned to the 85th Division. He was a handsome fellow, with a flashing friendly smile and even white teeth. He had done much amateur acting before entering the service and one of his ambitions was to be successful in radio dramatics. He was an excellent instructor and his tireless efforts and his splendid lectures to his men during training days in the United States and in Africa did much to build up the fighting efficiency and the fine spirit of the 339th Infantry. Now, in death, in a typical act of boldness and devotion to duty, he had made a major contribution to the smashing of the Gothic Line.

In spite of the courageous sacrifices of men like Carroll, however, as well as the constant, united hammering of the 338th and the 339th Infantry Regiments, with their supporting artillery and tank fire, it was swiftly becoming clear that two regiments were not enough to effect the breakthrough of the enemy defenses in the desired time. Accordingly, on 15 September, the 337th Infantry (with Company A, 310th Engineer Battalion, attached) was ordered to move at once to the vicinity of Luco di Nagello preparatory to taking a position to the right of the 339th in the sector of the British 1st Division. Now, in addition to the offensives which were to be continued against Altuzzo and Verruca, fresh forces were to be sent to the Signorini mass, east of Verruca and to Mount Pratone, the next high mountain to the northeast. The plan was for the 339th Infantry to continue its advance in its zone. The 66th Infantry Brigade of the British 1st Division would cut

northwest into the zone of the 85th to capture Mount Pratone. Company K, 339th Infantry, was ordered to leave the 339th's sector and follow the advance of the 66th Brigade, and occupy Mount Signorini. The advance of the 66th Brigade was also to be followed, by bounds, by the 337th Infantry. Upon the capture of Pratone, the 337th was to continue the advance to the north, assuming the zone and missions of the 339th. The advance of the British would have the full support of the 85th Division Artillery, and II Corps Artillery was directed to provide the 85th with maximum support. The chief purpose of this ambitious plan was to compel the enemy to withdraw from Verruca in order to protect his flank and thus make possible the further advance of the 85th Division in its zone.

Promptly at 0600 on the morning of the 16th, the 337th advanced into the zone of the British 1st Division, moving toward Pratone. Company K, 339th, now attached to the 337th, left its sector and advanced to the southeast slopes of Signorini.

At 0900 hours, 15 September, following an intense artillery preparation, the 338th and the 339th Infantry Regiments again attacked, and again they were halted by strong concentrations of enemy mortar, artillery, and machine-gun fire. The 1st Battalion, 339th, however, advanced slightly. Three more attempts by the 3d Battalion to take Hill 732 were repulsed. The 338th Infantry failed to advance during the day, but in the afternoon Colonel Mikkelsen's troops repelled two counterattacks against Hill 926.

Three long days had now passed and the enemy still held the line and still was able to summon forces and fire power to repel every attempt the Custer Division made at forward movement. The enemy's advantage of dug-in positions, well prepared and well protected, in precipitous mountain terrain was proving a tremendous obstacle. Observers later expressed amazement that advances were possible at all. But somehow the incredible Custermen managed to pick up a few yards here and a few feet there—constantly pressing forward. The enemy defenders were not green troops. Intelligence sources learned that elements of the famed 4th Parachute Division were opposing the 85th. At this time it was evident that the 12th Parachute Regiment was extended across the Division sector from Monticelli to Verruca. The 13th Company, acting as a rifle unit, was employed between Monticelli and Altuzzo. The 1st and 11th Companies were on Altuzzo, and the 9th and 10th Companies occupied Verruca. The 9th Company of the 1st Battalion, 735th Grenadier Regiment, held positions east of Verruca.

Almost from the very beginning of the offensive, although the enemy's resistance was intense and stubborn, it appeared that he was

short of supplies, especially food. The Mediterranean Allied Air Force and II Corps and Division Artillery units were raising havoc with the German supply routes. In addition, the first prisoners taken indicated that the enemy was desperately in need of replacements. II Corps and 85th Division Artillery were inflicting heavy losses upon him. Particularly effective were high-explosive and delayed-action shells, although the pillboxes and bunkers generally survived all but direct hits.

Into the fourth day went the raging battle for the Gothic Line. Although the fighting was still fierce and relentless, for the first time now it became apparent that every gain, however small, meant a deterioration in the enemy's position. More and more of the Germans' defenses were smashed and it became evident that they were no longer able to spread their fire so widely and effectively. And, most significant, they seemed unable to counterattack as swiftly and as consistently as they had in the early stages of the offensive. Throughout the 16th the attack continued. Small penetrations were made here and there, but the line was not broken.

The 339th had little success in its drive toward Hill 732 and the advance of Company K on Signorini was slow. In order to accelerate the attack in the Signorini area, Colonel Brady ordered Companies G and F to Hills 887 and 918, also part of the Signorini mass.

The British offensive against Mount Pratone, with the support of a great artillery barrage, jumped off in great force and made considerable progress toward the objective. The Germans struck back, however, and by mid-morning the British were still a thousand yards short of Pratone. In order to complete the plan now in effect, it was imperative that Pratone be captured as soon as possible. In order to assure this, the 337th Infantry was immediately ordered to pass through the British and continue the attack. The 3d Battalion advanced through the 2d Royal Scots Brigade and attempted to advance on Pratone. It was halted, however, by heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. During that afternoon and night the 1st Battalion moved over to its right in order to join in the attack on the following day. Colonel Hughes, CO of the 337th, went forward on the afternoon of the 16th on a personal reconnaissance to determine the most feasible route of advance for his regiment. The 337th was fresh, eager, and confident of its ability to make its battle skill a deciding factor in smashing the Gothic Line. After hours of arduous and dangerous reconnaissance, Colonel Hughes was at his wits' end. He shook his head in consternation. "This is the worst terrain I have ever seen," he said. "From all we have been able to discover so far, there is only one possible route of advance; and that

leads along that little goat path that winds and picks its way precariously around the side of that hill [885]. Every German gun of any caliber that can reach that path as it comes around the other side of the mountain is trained on that spot." The colonel was undaunted, however. He called his staff together to lay plans at once for an attack the following morning. A platoon of Company K was sent to the east of Hill 885 and a route for a successful advance was discovered. Company L followed to exploit the advance and continued to push ahead rapidly during the night.

The Custermen had now fought an all-out, vicious battle for almost four days. For four days they had been pounded by everything the enemy had. Their eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep; their limbs were weary; their beards were long. But at last the terrific hammering had begun to tell. At last a breakthrough appeared imminent. The defenses on Altuzzo were greatly weakened, the Verruca fortifications had been largely reduced, and a way had been found to advance on Pratone. It was also encouraging to learn that the Custermen were not the only ones who were exhausted. Prisoners taken showed more and more the strain of the four-day battle. Many of them had been without food or water for more than two days, as a result of the steady harassing of their supply lines by the artillery. In addition to these troops, however, there were found among the prisoners many new arrivals, reinforcements from other units. There were men from the 735th Grenadier Regiment and the 305th Reconnaissance Battalion, but most of these had arrived too late. Many of them had been heavily shelled by the artillery as they tried to come down through Firenzuola, and their units had suffered a large number of casualties. Whole units of the enemy's replacement forces were confused and lost, and many of them were taken prisoner before they had an opportunity to join the units with which they were supposed to fight.

An outstanding instance of this was when the Germans made one of their last efforts in the 339th's sector in the form of an attempt to recapture Hill 591. An artillery radio operator of the British 1st Division had picked up a German message which, decoded, stated that the relief of the 3d Battalion, 12th Parachute Regiment, by the Lehr Brigade, would be effected on the night of 16 September. A British artillery colonel made the information available to the 337th Infantry, with whose headquarters he was cooperating at the time. Liaison representatives of the 339th, stationed at the 337th's CP, picked it up and relayed it to Capt. Lee Haas, the 339th's communications officer, who passed it on to Colonel Brady. Brady acted at once. Artillery shelling in the sector was increased. A pre-dawn attack by the 3d Battalion was

planned to catch the Lehr Brigade in as disorganized a state as possible. The Lehr Brigade was wholly surprised. Many were killed or captured and the rest were unable to effectively organize the defense of the position. By 0800 hours on the morning of the 17th, the 3d Battalion had seized Hills 724 and 732, and Company A had helped Company L retake Hill 591. Sensing victory in the air, the 1st Battalion smashed on to seize Verruca and by 1700 hours the 2d Battalion had taken Hills 918, 802, 1031 and 1036, and the 3d Battalion had joined the 1st on Verruca. It was now clear that the 339th Infantry had broken the Gothic Line in its zone.

All along the 85th Division front during 17 September the Gothic Line was cracking. The enemy was no longer able to stand the constant artillery pounding, the repeated infantry assaults, and the harassing of his supply lines. In addition, his reinforcements were now too few and too late. The 85th Division Artillery alone in the period 0800 hours, 16 September, to 0800 hours, 17 September, fired 104 harassing missions, seven missions against pillboxes, a registration mission, eleven missions against personnel and vehicles, 28 TOTs (Time on Target: the fire of several batteries or battalions timed so that all shells land on one specific target area at approximately the same moment), two missions against mortars, a mission against a self-propelled gun, and five preparations.

On the morning of the 17th, the 337th continued the relentless attack on Mount Pratone. The terrain alone made the going difficult, and in addition the enemy was still striking back. After a day of hard fighting, Hill 945 and the high ground east of the summit of Pratone were taken by the 1st and 3d Battalions. By 1730 hours, one company was on the crest of Pratone. All the way up during the day as the men of the 337th climbed along the ridges toward Pratone and through the Rampolli draw, they were pounded by enemy heavy mortar concentrations skillfully laid down in the path of their advance; and, although the resistance was weakening, a few of the bunkers were being manned. But here at last was victory, and the 337th plucked its fair share of triumph in the smashing of the Gothic Line. By midnight the entire 3d Battalion had occupied Pratone and was organizing defense positions to hold the mountain.

The 338th Infantry held off its final attack on Altuzzo temporarily in order to allow the 91st Division, on the Custer Division's left flank, to capture Monticelli. During the morning of the 17th, Colonel Mikkelsen's men consolidated their positions and prepared for the

knockout blow. The men were still receiving fire from Mount Freddo, a high point across the road and northwest of Altuzzo. Shortly after dark, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 338th began a general advance to seize the remaining high points of the Altuzzo mass. They pushed slowly, but steadily, forward during the night against enemy mortar and small-arms fire. Before morning, the 338th had seized most of its objectives on Altuzzo.

During the engagement a strong enemy force launched a counterattack against Company K positions, but it was temporarily checked, almost single-handedly, by Pfc. Leonard E. Frick of Toledo, Ohio, who was occupying a position directly in the path of the onslaught. Frick directed a deadly hail of fire into the ranks of the attackers, killing two and wounding several others. His rifle suddenly failed, however, and the heroic Custerman found himself without a weapon. In spite of this, he remained in position. With the intense fire of the enemy directed at him, he engaged the Germans with hand grenades at close range. Frick's determination prevailed. Standing his ground as he did, he lent enormous assistance in breaking up the attack and holding it off until supporting troops could move up and join in the fight. Frick was later awarded the Silver Star.

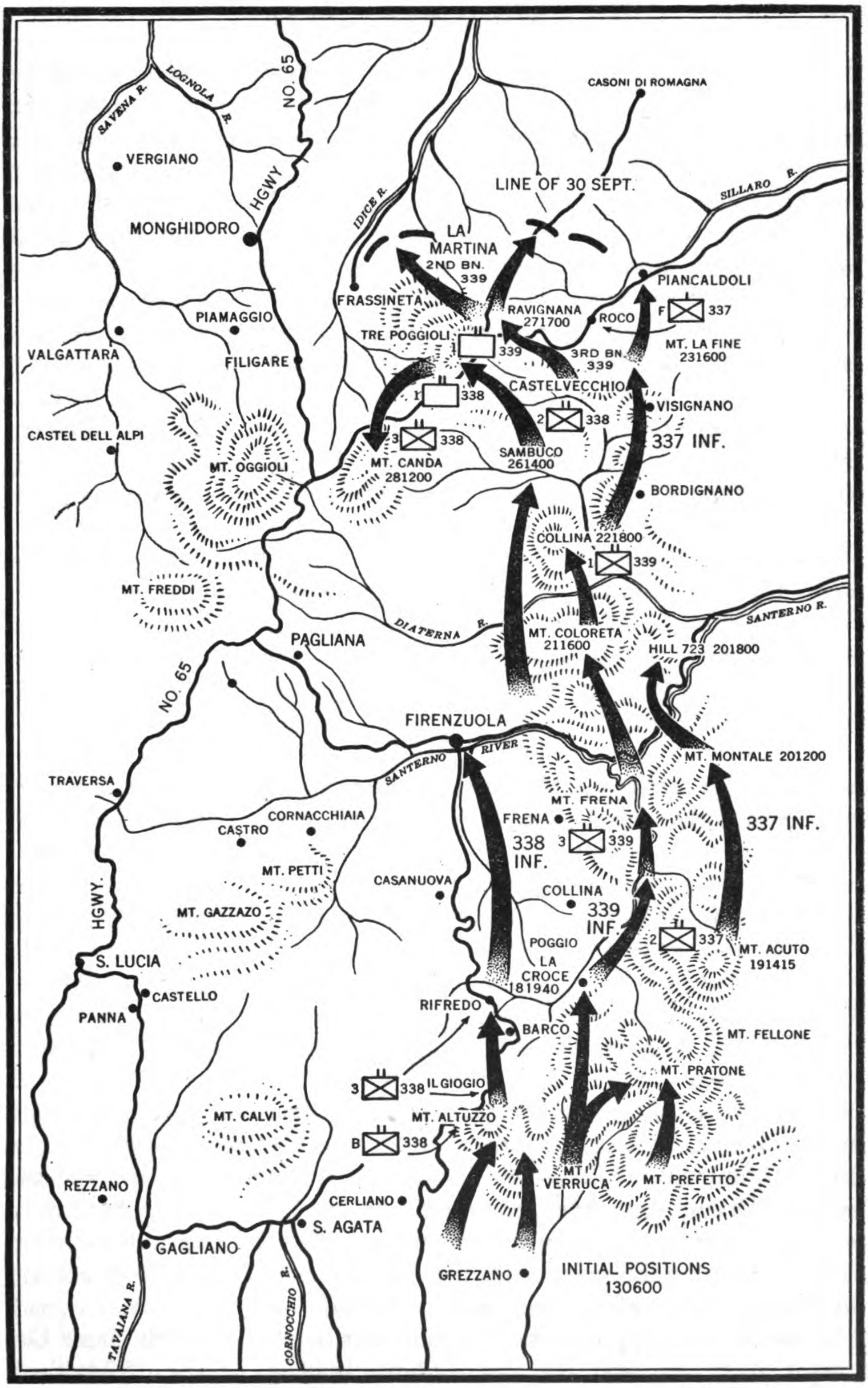
Frick's sterling performance, however, was more than matched by another fighting man of the 338th Infantry the same day on Altuzzo. He was Pvt. Peter Kubina, Jr., of Greensburg, Pennsylvania. After his platoon had assaulted two enemy bunkers, Kubina took up a position from which he could fire upon the bunkers and protect the right flank of his platoon. A sharp fire fight developed and Kubina, firing swiftly and accurately, killed four of the enemy. A short time later his platoon learned that the enemy was moving out in a counterattack. The platoon withdrew to prepared defense positions from which it could repel the assault, but Kubina voluntarily remained behind to cover the platoon's withdrawal with his automatic rifle. Making his way to an abandoned German machine-gun nest, he opened fire as the enemy launched the counterattack. All about him the enemy's bullets were striking the ground, kicking up the dirt, but he remained in position and calmly fired his weapon, killing four and wounding six of the enemy and seriously disrupting the ranks of the attackers. The attack was thrown back and Kubina moved from his machine-gun nest to an abandoned bunker. Here he met another soldier from the 338th and together they entered the fortified position. Inside they found a large amount of enemy equipment so they set about destroying it so it would not be of further aid to the Germans in case the bunker should fall into their hands again. While they were engrossed in this work, a German soldier

suddenly walked into the bunker. Kubina whirled around with the swiftness of a panther, took quick aim from the hip and pulled the trigger. The weapon jammed, however, and did not fire. Hurling his automatic rifle at the surprised German, Kubina grabbed an enemy machine pistol on the floor and killed him with a quick burst. Suspecting that where there is one Kraut there are probably more, Kubina rushed to the door of the bunker just in time to almost crash head-on into another German soldier coming in. Using the same machine pistol, he fired at once before the German could act, and killed him too. He decided that it was high time to get away from here, so he and his companion went out the door and left the bunker. They had gone only a short distance, however, when they were attacked by eight enemy soldiers firing automatic weapons. Kubina and his companion hit the ground and returned such a heavy and accurate volume of fire that the enemy retreated. Kubina was killed in a later engagement, but for this day's heroic work he was awarded, posthumously, the Distinguished Service Cross.

All three regiments dug in and prepared defense positions to repel counterattacks. They also were ready at a moment's notice to resume the attack to the north. A few remaining enemy pockets persisted in holding out and the Custermen set about vigorously to reduce them. At last along the entire length of the 85th Division front, the Gothic Line had been smashed. General Clark's faith in the striking power of the 85th had not been misplaced. The enemy's last-minute reinforcements—the 735th Grenadier Regiment on Rotto, the 305th Fusilier Battalion on Signorini, and the Lehr Brigade on Verruca and Pian di Giogo—had been unable to prevent the breakthrough and the Germans were now attempting to disengage themselves from the remaining positions toward which the 85th was advancing.

Toward the end, more and more of the enemy surrendered. Some were surrounded and cut off from assistance; some were out of food and ammunition; others were crushed by the power of the final offensives. By noon of the 18th, 230 prisoners had been taken and in the next two days many more passed through the Division POW cages. The enemy's losses in dead and wounded however, were even greater. The 85th's small-arms, artillery, machine-gun, cannon, and mortar fire had been devastating and the enemy dead lay scattered about the barren mountain sides in great numbers.

The breach of the Gothic Line was a tremendous accomplishment, a magnificent feat of arms. Before the attack began, troops and guns had been taken from Fifth Army to build up the power of Seventh



Map 11: The destruction of the Gothic Line. The 85th advances toward the Po Valley. (Scale 1:108,000)

Army's assault against Southern France. Fifth Army men, therefore, launched their offensive against the Gothic Line lacking the superiority in numbers considered necessary to breach a defense position entrenched in such difficult terrain. It takes less men to defend a position than it does to attack one, yet in the fight to break the Gothic Line and during the advance to the north across the rugged Apennines toward the Po Valley, the numbers on both sides were about equal, and on many occasions the 85th found itself attacking with less men than the enemy was using for defense. The numbers of the enemy, however, were only one obstacle. In addition, the divisions of Fifth Army, among them the 85th, faced more back-breaking, mountainous terrain than that encountered by any other Allied force on the Eastern or the Western Fronts. Not only were the mountains high, and difficult to climb in the face of enemy fire, but they were also jagged and precipitous, presenting to men and pack animals alike the constant danger of making a misstep and falling into deep gorges to a quick, violent death. Furthermore, the enemy had a complete, intricate, and powerful network of defense positions made of caves, boulders, logs, steel, and concrete, which he considered so strong that he boasted it would never be penetrated by any attacking Allied force. Fifth Army, and the 85th, had won a great victory.

Beyond the key features of Altuzzo, Verruca and Pratone, the enemy had no strongly prepared line of defense. However, the 85th Division's route of advance toward Bologna and the fertile Po Valley lay across mountains and more mountains, many as high and some higher than the ones just captured. There was no pause in the offensive. The Division struck out toward the north heading for its next major objectives. These were the dominating mountains of Mount Frena, Mount Montale, overlooking the Santerno Valley from the south, and Mount Coloreta, the dominant mountain northeast of Firenzuola, ranging in elevation from 2,900 to 3,400 feet.

At 1000 hours, 18 September, the 85th Division, with three regiments abreast, advanced north to seize intermediate objectives. The 337th Infantry drove for 3,500-foot Mount Fellone which blocked the path to Mount Acuto and Mount Montale. Colonel Hughes' troops were on the right flank. In the center, the 339th Infantry advanced on Poggio la Croce and on the left the 338th set out for the high ground on the west overlooking the town of Rifredo on the Firenzuola road. The attack was supported by Division Artillery, the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the Assault-Gun Platoon of the 752d Tank Battalion.

The 337th made steady advances throughout the day. The 1st Battalion moved north over three intervening hills and finally halted on the southeast slopes of Fellone. The 2d Battalion advanced against heavy resistance and captured the hill itself. The 3d Battalion took a westerly course and, about dark, was halted by strong enemy fire one kilometer due west of Fellone.

Moving down from Verruca and Poggio Rotto the 339th cleared the northern slopes and then pushed north along the ridge east of the Firenzuola road. Before the day was over, it had captured and occupied Hill 681 and Poggio la Croce.

The 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, left the Altuzzo mass and seized the high ground on each side of the road below Il Giogo. Elements of the 1st and 2d Battalions now advanced along the road toward the town of Barco, two kilometers away. The hill mass dominating this section of the road on the west was now incorporated in the Division zone and elements of these two battalions cut directly north to seize Hills 1029 and 1041 during the night. Early in the morning of 19 September, the 3d Battalion, coming along the road, captured Rifredo.

During the 19th the terrain encountered was less severe than on preceding days and the enemy was offering only short, although stubborn, delaying actions from hastily prepared positions. The mountains in the left part of the Division's sector were now less wooded and the Custermen found themselves advancing over ground which offered little or no concealment. The weather continued clear for several days, although early morning valley mists generally clung for an hour or two after sunrise.

General Coulter ordered his men to exploit rapidly the advances now in progress and he and his staff began conferences with General Clark and representatives of the 88th Division. The purpose of these discussions was to enable the 85th to assist the 88th in its passage through the Custer Division's lines in order to take up positions on the right flank of the 85th. Clark had been holding the 88th Division in reserve all during the attack against the Gothic Line. The 88th was, in fact, all the reserve force that he had to throw against the enemy. Once they were committed, the entire Fifth Army would be in the fight with both feet. There would be then no rested, fresh division to throw in if the enemy succeeded in making a strong stand anywhere between the Gothic Line and the Po Valley. Clark needed more power now, however; with the enemy falling back, he needed fresh forces to exploit the breakthrough. Later on, perhaps, a division could be pulled back to constitute a new army reserve; but lacking superiority in numbers, Clark did not see how he was going to be able to spare a division from

the lines. He had to calculate carefully. The reserve must be committed where its added weight and energy would do the most good. Since the 85th was the first division of Fifth Army through the Gothic Line, General Clark decided to commit the 88th near the area of the breakthrough and he chose the right flank of the 85th. The Custermen were encouraged to hear that the Blue Devils were going to fight beside them again, for, in the Rome offensive, the two divisions, the first Selective Service divisions of the Army of the United States to enter combat in World War II, had fought side by side all the way up. Each had great respect for the fighting ability of the other, although each stoutly maintained that it was the better division.

Moving down from Fellone on the morning of the 19th, the 337th Infantry pushed on against slight resistance. During the afternoon, however, the supply lines of the 337th moving across Mount Pratone came under heavy enemy shelling. Men leaped from trucks before they stopped rolling and sought the makeshift shelter of depressions, washouts, and irregularities in the hillside as more than a hundred rounds of light and medium artillery from German guns came whistling and smashing into the area. The 2d Battalion pushed on swiftly from Fellone to Mount Acuto, by-passing enemy pockets which they left for the 1st Battalion to mop up as it came along a short time later. The 2d and 3d Battalions were now abreast and they advanced steadily from high point to high point along the ridge running north from Acuto. The forward elements reached Hill 849, two kilometers south of Montale, shortly after dark and the men halted for the night. Contact patrols went forward and the rest of the men prepared to resume the advance early in the morning.

The 339th Infantry, meanwhile, kept up a steady advance north of Poggio la Croce in the direction of Mount Frena. By mid-afternoon the 1st and 2d Battalions were within two kilometers of the objective. Lt.Col. Richard Smith's 3d Battalion, which had been in regimental reserve, then carried the ball, pushing on past the forward units. They advanced so efficiently and rapidly that by 1730 hours they had reached Collina and by 1940 hours had occupied Mount Frena.

On the 20th, Colonel Hughes continued his advance. The 1st Battalion encountered enemy resistance in an all-day drive which brought it at nightfall to positions east of Montale. At noon the 3d Battalion went into reserve on Montale, while the 2d Battalion, passing west and north of the mountain, crossed the Santerno River near San Pellegrino and took up positions for the night on the hills just beyond the northern bank. The Santerno River was a narrow, shallow stream. The river bottom was firm and vehicles and troops alike easily negotiated the

banks. There had been only intermittent showers and a few hours of steady rain on 20 September. The next day, however, the rain was prolonged and heavy, swelling the stream and flooding the roads, so that when Division Artillery displaced forward it had a wet, muddy, difficult time.

The forward elements of the 337th had now, on 20 September, reached a line running just north of Montale. In getting this far, they greatly facilitated the passage of elements of the 88th Division to their new positions. During the night of 20-21 September contact was established with the 349th and the 350th Infantry Regiments of the 88th, and preparations were made for the 337th to pass into Division reserve.

In the meantime, trouble was brewing again for the 338th and 339th. The enemy had taken up positions on a line running along the ridge west of Mount Frena and was delaying the advance of the two regiments with intense concentrations of light and heavy mortar fire and fire from all types of small arms. From their positions the Germans could fire into the left flank of the 339th and the right front of the 338th. The 338th was also being hit by the fire of enemy self-propelled guns, and machine-gun and artillery fire coming from northwest of Casanova. Heavy fire from the enemy's positions in the zone of the 91st Division, on the 85th's left flank, delayed the 1st Battalion. The 3d Battalion was similarly halted, but the pressure on both these battalions was finally relieved by the action of the 2d Battalion, 339th Infantry, firing from the vicinity of Hill 646.

G-2 now revealed that the enemy was again receiving reinforcements. On the night of 19 September, elements of the 1059th Grenadier Regiment arrived in Firenzuola, marching southward immediately to meet the advancing 85th. Units of the 715th Infantry Division were also identified.

It was now 20 September, three days after the historic breach of the Gothic Line. The enemy had been defeated in that great battle. However, his present retreat was not a rout. He was taking advantage of some of the best defensive terrain in the world to fight back every step of the way. The 339th continued to press forward, against gathering resistance. The 1st Battalion, moving on from Capannina, ran into heavy mortar fire coming from its left as it passed west of Frena, but by nightfall had crossed the Santerno River. The 2d Battalion took care of pockets of resistance on the Frena–Firenzuola ridge, while the 3d Battalion remained in reserve on Frena.

General Kendall's Blue Devils were now ready, and on the morning of 21 September, elements of the 88th Division began the relief of the 337th Infantry. Control of the 337th's sector passed to the commanding

general of the 88th Division at 0500 hours, but the terrain was so rugged and irregular that the relief was not completed until afternoon. The 337th went into Division reserve. The Custer Division's right boundary was now fixed along a line which ran from a point just west of Fognano northward, crossing the Santerno River east of Borg and continuing past the eastern slopes of Mount Coloreta.

While the 88th was getting into position, preparing to add its weight to the offensive, the 338th and 339th Infantry Regiments renewed the advance of the 85th Division. The first heavy fight the enemy put up beyond the Santerno was on 3,300-foot Mount Coloreta, to the east of Firenzuola. Coloreta, lofty and sprawled over a large area, resembled in general outline a large, inverted mixing bowl. For the first 150 or 200 feet, the ascent was almost perpendicular, but toward the summit the rise became more gradual. On 21 September, supported by tanks and tank destroyers, the 339th advanced toward this objective. Elements of the 1st Battalion were on the southern slopes of Mount Coloreta shortly after noon on the 21st. The 2d Battalion moved a little more slowly but succeeded in clearing a dominating ridge near the town of Frena by noon. During the afternoon, however, growing resistance compelled both battalions to advance slowly. Two more rifle companies were committed. In spite of the tough footing, however, and the stronger stand of the enemy, by 1700 hours one company of the 1st Battalion was on the peak of Coloreta and the other companies held positions on other parts of the hill mass. By nightfall, the 2d Battalion, which had moved over into the sector of the 338th Infantry in order to take advantage of more favorable terrain, moved up to occupy most of the Coloreta mass and the 1st Battalion continued on to take Collina against moderate resistance.

On the 21st the 338th Infantry swept into Firenzuola. The enemy preferred to avoid contact here, so the 3d Battalion met little resistance as it pushed on. Just before reaching the town, this battalion swung around to the east of it, crossed the Santerno River and seized the high ground to the north. Little enemy artillery fire was falling but there was sharp harassing fire from self-propelled guns to the north. However, the enemy was soon to step up his artillery fire in and around Firenzuola. This town was the largest of the Northern Apennines villages, lying along the route from Florence to Bologna. It was nestled in a valley ringed with mountains, something after the fashion of Florence. The latter's cradle was much more spacious and majestic in sweep; yet in its own, smaller way, Firenzuola had been an attractive, peaceful community before the fury of war smashed it. For, midway

between Florence and Bologna, Firenzuola lay astride the only half-decent supply road in the Division's sector. Planes of both sides had bombed it; the Custer Division's artillery had hammered it during the enemy occupation; and now the Germans were shelling it heavily. At 1600 hours, the 1st Battalion entered the town and found it in ruins. Buildings had been smashed to bits and debris was everywhere. In many places one could hardly tell where the streets had been, so deep was the rubble. The 310th Engineers moved into the town with the infantrymen to construct Bailey bridges across the Santerno. However, on the 21st, the day of the occupation of the town, and throughout most of the next day, they were forestalled by accurate enemy artillery fire, in large concentrations, directed against the crossing sites and the town itself. The Division's chemical troops moved up swiftly to lay smoke screens to obscure the targets and to protect the Division's supply convoys.

The 2d and 3d Battalions of the 338th now moved slowly north in the area immediately west of Coloreta, meeting determined resistance and long-range artillery fire from Mount Canda, five miles north-northwest of Firenzuola. Company E ran into heavy machine-gun fire from the crest of Hill 733, northeast of Firenzuola and it was here that Lt. Orville E. Bloch, of Streeter, North Dakota, launched his own personal offensive against the enemy and won the Custer Division's third Medal of Honor. Bloch survived the action.

The task he undertook was wiping out five enemy machine-gun nests holding up the advance of the 2d Battalion. From his own platoon Lieutenant Bloch obtained three volunteers and constituted a patrol. The four men wormed their way over the ground to a large rock, behind which a group of three buildings and five machine guns were located. Bloch left the three men behind the rock and attacked the first nest alone. The Germans spotted him, but he charged into the enemy's furious fire, fiercely kicked over the machine gun, and captured the crew of five. He quickly turned his prisoners over to his men and returned to renew his attack. Pulling the pin from a hand grenade and holding it ready in his hand he again dashed into the withering fire. This time his objective was a second enemy machine gun located at the corner of an adjacent building fifteen yards away. When he was within twenty feet of this gun he threw the grenade, wounding the gunner. The other two members of the gun crew fled through a nearby door leading into the house. Bloch quickly called to one of his men to accompany him and together the two Custermen advanced to the opposite end of the house. Just as they reached it, they spotted a five-man enemy machine-gun crew running toward the house. Bloch and his man fired on this

crew at once, forcing the Germans to abandon their machine gun and ammunition and flee into the house. A less aggressive man would have made plans at this point to lay siege to the house, or would have withdrawn and called down friendly artillery fire. But not Bloch. Without an instant's hesitation, and unassisted, he rushed through the door into the enemy's small-arms fire, firing his carbine from the hip. His unexpected and violent assault stunned and overwhelmed the Germans. In the exchange of fire Bloch was unhurt, but he wounded three of the enemy and the other four promptly surrendered to him.

Even this, however, was not enough. Taking his companion with him, he moved on to a third house. Here they discovered an abandoned enemy machine gun and detected another enemy machine-gun nest at the next corner of the building. Again the enemy saw him coming. This time the German gun crew of six spotted him at the same instant that he saw them. Almost before they could move, Bloch leaped out into the open and dashed toward them. The Germans fired their pistols wildly in his direction and vanished through a door of the house, but he was right behind them. He followed them swiftly through the door, again firing his carbine from the hip, wounding two of the enemy and capturing all six. Altogether, Lieutenant Bloch had single-handedly captured nineteen prisoners, wounded six of them, and eliminated a total of five enemy machine-gun nests. Spared many casualties by Bloch's fearless actions and tremendously inspired by his display of courage, Company E resumed its attack with great vigor.

The 85th now moved steadily forward over the increasingly rugged hills toward Mount Canda and Mount la Fine, four miles northeast of Canda. The general plan was to by-pass Canda on the east because of the very steep ascent to the mountain top up the southern slopes. Torre Poggioli (Hill 966), including the Zanobi rock, was to be seized, and then, from there, forces could be sent southwest to take Canda. The Division's sector now covered a progressively wider front, although, at first, only two regiments were to be on line. The 337th Infantry was to advance east of the positions held by the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 339th Infantry in the vicinity of Coloreta, and, on making contact with the 3d Battalion, 339th, would take over the zone and mission of the 339th. The 1st and 2d Battalions of the 339th, after mopping up the remaining resistance in this locality and assisting the 337th Infantry in the former 339th zone, were instructed to assemble in Division reserve along the Firenzuola road. The 3d Battalion, 339th, then coordinating its advance with the 349th Infantry (88th Division) on the right, would be attached to the 337th Infantry on 23 September.

These units would then advance on Mount la Fine. The 338th was instructed to strike northwest and take Mount Canda, the great mountain east of the Passo della Radicosa. The 3d Battalion, 337th, would remain temporarily in Division reserve.

The Germans, determined to thwart the capture of Canda and la Fine, had chosen as their center of resistance the small town of Sambuco and the Ravignana heights to the north of it. Sambuco was a small village of thick-walled stone houses nestled in the center of a surrounding crown of hills and gullies. All around the perimeter of the town the Germans had placed well dug-in machine guns. In the town itself, the houses were barricaded and machine guns placed in them behind the protective barriers. The Ravignana heights to the north offered excellent observation points from which the Germans could watch the Custer Division's advance on Sambuco, and, in addition, they afforded commanding ground north of the town should Sambuco fall. In all of the bleak Northern Apennines, there was no more desolate and barren spot than the Ravignana heights. There was nothing there, except for the Germans who lay dug into their slopes and, later, for the Americans who came and killed them, moving on toward the north. In a fog-drenched, fall drizzle the place exuded all the fearsome, eerie atmosphere of the misty English moors. In normal times, a chance mountain hiker would find neither human nor animal life there. It was a spot that seemed to have been especially prepared by Satan to go with all the other accompanying horrors of war.

Enemy reserves were moving up into Sambuco and Torre Poggioli and it was evident that the resistance would be stiff. Two days of hard fighting were required to reduce Sambuco. It was only after repeated attacks and considerable close-in fighting supported by tanks that the village was taken by reinforced elements of the 2d Battalion, 338th. While this battle was raging, other forces of the 85th were marshalling for the attack on Ravignana heights and on Torre Poggioli. The advance on these two objectives was begun on 25 September from the vicinity of Mount la Fine, which had been occupied by the 337th Infantry. The 339th was in Division reserve as the attack began, but its elements began to move forward as circumstances demanded. Lieutenant Colonel Smith's 3d Battalion, which had been attached to the 337th, was attached to the 338th Infantry at 0800 on the 25th, and ordered to move west from the vicinity of la Fine to aid the 3d Battalion, 338th, which had run into strong resistance in its assault on Torre Poggioli. The latter battalion had one company on the southern slopes of Torre Poggioli at an early hour on 25 September. The rest of the battalion was moving up. At this point, however, the enemy struck back and while the com-

pany on the slopes was able to retain the positions it had won, the rest of the battalion was prevented from coming up and joining it. During the morning, the Germans launched a series of unsuccessful counterattacks against the 338th's forward company. In the afternoon, however, another strong counterattack supported by tanks forced the right platoon of the company to withdraw. It was evident that the Germans had considerable strength here. Additional counterattacks during the rest of the day were repelled and Division Artillery built up strong fires to break the force of the enemy's assaults. After dark, the Germans began to infiltrate the forward positions of the 338th, and the forward company, now low on ammunition, decided it wiser to withdraw. The battalion reorganized at once and prepared to renew the offensive.

General Coulter, his Chief of Staff, Colonel Fitts, and his G-3, Colonel Kaesser, agreed that more strength was needed if Torre Poggioli were to be quickly reduced and the pace of the Division's advance continued. The 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, was already on its way from la Fine to aid the 338th, but it had been temporarily halted by accurate mortar and small-arms fire. Accordingly, the 1st Battalion, 338th, which had been in a blocking position guarding the regiment's left flank, was ordered to join in the attack on Torre Poggioli the next day. The 85th Reconnaissance Troop was attached to the 338th and, together with Company B of that regiment, took over the protection of the west flank. The 1st Battalion, 339th, was also attached to the 338th, with the mission of joining with the 1st Battalion, 338th, in the renewed attack on Torre Poggioli the following day. During the night, the 1st Battalion, 339th, moved from its positions near Bordignano to join the 1st Battalion of the 338th Infantry.

With the 1st Battalion of the 339th in the lead, the two battalions struck out in a pre-dawn attack against Torre Poggioli. The enemy fought back fiercely, laying down intense mortar and artillery barrages. Tanks supporting the new Custer Division assault on this vital mountain mass were hampered somewhat by fields of antitank mines. At the day's end, the leading units were near the crest of Torre Poggioli.

The following day, 27 September, the attack was resumed, with the supporting tanks firing machine guns and high-explosive shells at close range. The enemy still resisted bitterly from the mountain itself and from the high ground to the west and south. The Germans were pouring out small-arms fire and mortar fire in great volume. In addition they were making good use of 75mm and 105mm self-propelled guns. By mid-morning, however, the tanks supporting the 85th Division's assault had worked their way up over the rough terrain and had crossed the highway leading southwest to Canda. By 1100 hours, some of the

enemy, fearing that they would be cut off, were seen withdrawing to the north. Infantrymen, under cover of a heavy artillery barrage, stormed up the mountain side, but as they neared the crest they came under heavy long-range machine-gun and artillery fire from the enemy's positions on the northern slopes of Mount Canda. In spite of this new opposition the first troops of the two attacking battalions reached the crest of Torre Poggioli by noon. Shortly afterward, the remaining enemy defenders were killed or driven off the mountain. Positions were consolidated during the night and contact was established with the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, near Ravignana. The 1st Battalion, 339th Infantry, remained on Torre Poggioli, while, after dark, the 3d Battalion, 338th, began a movement to the high ground to the south and west of Torre Poggioli in order to be in position to attack Canda from the northeast. This turned out to be a difficult march made in pitch darkness in slippery mire, over rugged terrain. There were few things more discomforting to the foot soldier than a long night march over muddy, rough ground after a tiring day of hard combat action. Even on a good solid, gravel road over level ground, night marches required considerable coordination and control. Under adverse conditions they were irritating, exhausting ordeals. However, by now the Custermen had carried out so many night marches—in Mississippi, Louisiana, California, North Africa, and, in combat, a good part of the way up the Italian boot from Minturno on—that they could accomplish any night march assigned. No one ever enjoyed them, however, and it was amazing solace and satisfaction at the conclusion of one of them to curl up in a bed sack in a hole in the ground, or on the sheltered side of a mound of hay, or even in a dirty corner of a local barn.

The enemy also made use of the dark and the rain of that night, however, to cover the withdrawal of some of his units; and during the night of 27-28 September much of the self-propelled-gun and mortar fire from Mount Canda ceased.

Sambuco had fallen to the 2d Battalion, 338th, on 27 September. The last stages of this battle developed into a fierce, house-to-house fight. Supporting tanks had to be brought up to fire point-blank into the enemy positions. The town was levelled. Company G, 338th, with close support, made the final assault.

The advance of the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, on Ravignana had been made in the face of sniper fire in the draws and machine-gun and mortar fire coming from the Ravignana heights, but the attack continued. Careful reconnaissance of the enemy's positions and strength were made and Colonel Brady ordered heavy concentrations of mortar and artillery fire to be laid on the heights. One 339th soldier, charging

an enemy machine-gun nest near the crest of one section of the heights, got within thirty yards of the enemy gun crew. The gun crew consisted of three Germans who had thrown themselves into a hastily dug, shallow emplacement, hurriedly camouflaged. They could lie in position and, looking down below, observe the approach of the Americans. This soldier had to climb up the steep slope to the machine-gun nest and in addition he had to carry his heavy Browning automatic rifle. The Custerman and the Germans exchanged fire almost simultaneously. The former's bursts were long, fierce, and accurate. The latter missed on the first two short bursts, but then got the range. The firing suddenly ceased. The American fell dead, riddled with machine-gun bullets. But in the machine-gun nest were three dead men. Two were sprawled on their backs, one shot through the head, the other through the heart. The third German, the gunner, lay slumped over his gun, blood pouring from fatal wounds in the chest and head. In the dank, muddy earth the opponents lay silent in death, giving mute but compelling testimony of the fierceness of the struggle in the mountains of Italy.

Another Custerman, in the vicinity of Roco, east of Ravignana, gave one of the most outstanding exhibitions of determination the men of the Division had yet witnessed. A Hollywood scenario writer developing, fictionally, the same scene would have rejected several things that this man did as being unrealistic, excessive dramatics. Pfc. Louis H. Gallagher, of Butler, Pennsylvania, was the star. A force of sixty Germans struck his battalion's front and right flank in a sudden counterattack which enabled many of the enemy to infiltrate to the rear of a heavy machine-gun position. Gallagher, a machine gunner, now without rifle protection to his front, realized the dangerous threat to this position. Holding his ground, he aimed and fired his weapon at the advancing enemy. A concussion grenade struck his gun and temporarily stunned him. Picking himself up, Gallagher ran a twenty-yard gantlet of exploding grenades and point-blank fire to the other gun of his section. When he reached this machine gun, he found that the traversing mechanism had been hit and was jammed. Lifting the weapon from the damaged cradle, he placed it on his hip and fired at the enemy until a bullet from a German machine pistol struck the water jacket and knocked the gun from his hands. Without hesitation, he rushed over to a dead rifleman and seized from him an M-1 rifle. From a standing position he boldly fired this weapon at the enemy until his ammunition was expended. Throwing the rifle to the ground, Gallagher picked up another rifle and continued to fire at the enemy until he was killed by a burst from a machine pistol. The War Department later considered this inspiring exhibition of fighting spirit worthy of the DSC.

It was also in the vicinity of Roco that Company F, 337th Infantry, received the Distinguished Unit Citation for outstanding performance of duty in action. The period for which the award was made was 23-29 September 1944, when the company held dominating Mount Monzano for six days in the face of repeated German attempts to regain the strategically important terrain feature. The citation goes on to relate:

". . . Occupying positions with little cover, as foxholes could not be dug in the solid rock, the infantrymen of this company were pounded mercilessly by enemy mortar fire and subjected to constant sniper and machine-gun fire from the front and both flanks. Personnel of the company suffered bitterly from exposure to extreme cold and dampness, and frequent fogs enshrouded the mountain peak, providing the enemy with concealment for his attacks, infiltration tactics, and close-in harassing fire with automatic weapons. Supplies were hand-carried up a sheer, muddy slope swept by enemy fire, and casualties were evacuated over the same difficult and precipitous route. Despite all obstacles, the courageous infantrymen of Company F repelled four strong counterattacks and clung tenaciously to their precarious position, fighting grimly with rifles, bazookas, and grenades, pushing the enemy from the hill and inflicting heavy losses. Finally, after friendly forces on both flanks had advanced, Company F moved forward in the attack. The fortitude and invincible fighting spirit exhibited by officers and men of Company F, 337th Infantry Regiment, are magnificent tributes to the Infantry of the United States."

The weather during the Gothic Line–Northern Apennines campaign to date had been generally fair with some showers. Now, however, the fall rains began. On 28 September, there was a heavy downpour which added to the difficulties ordinarily presented by the terrain. Roads and jeep trails were flooded. Tanks had a particularly difficult job moving forward. Mules were used in large numbers to carry supplies to the front. Many of the animals were killed in the heavy enemy shellings through which they had to pass to get to the forward positions.

Beset by these difficulties, the 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, swept away light enemy resistance on the northeast slopes of Canda and at noon on the 28th captured the mountain.

The rain continued heavy, causing a 24-hour delay in the advance. During that period all three regiments consolidated their positions, patrolled extensively, and prepared for a resumption of the offensive. The next enemy defense line was expected to be the hills about eight to ten kilometers north of Canda.

The end of the month of September found the 85th Division poised for a new attack to the north on each side of the Torrente Idice to take the dominating hills, seize and hold a line just south of the Via Emilia, and prepare to move down into the Po Valley. September had been an eventful and historic month. The 85th had breached the Gothic Line, the last prepared defense line south of the Po Valley. It had advanced fifteen miles by map distance, against a determined enemy and over nearly impassable terrain. It had conquered the last two ridges of the Northern Apennines, crossing the first when it broke the Gothic Line guarding Il Giogo Pass and crossing the second when it captured Torre Poggioli and Canda, the great mountains protecting the Passo della Radicosa (Radicosa Pass). The terrain had been terrible, mostly very steep and rocky. The few roads that were in the Division's sector were generally poor and most of them had to be improved by the engineers before they were serviceable for supply vehicles. The Division and corps engineers not only repaired and maintained these roads under very difficult conditions, but they built several new roads. The longest single road constructed by the 85th Division's 310th Engineer Battalion extended from Firenzuola to Sasso di San Zanobi, a distance of eight miles.

The generally fair weather and moderate temperature gave way to cold and driving rain in the last days of the month. The rain was so heavy and persistent that it hampered the advance considerably. On the last clear day before the rains fell, when the Custermen were in the vicinity of Mount Canda, the Po Valley could be seen off in the distance. With the unaided eye, one could make out the roads and the towns and villages of the Valley. Far to the north, across the level farmlands, the towering, snow-capped peaks of the Alps could be seen with the aid of binoculars. There, within sight and grasp, lay the rich prize of Northern Italy—the Po Valley. Across the path to that objective, however, there still lay many obstacles. The seasonal rains which had now begun was one; the continuation of mountainous terrain, albeit a range of lower hills, was another; and a third was the rapidly increasing enemy resistance and reinforcements. The rain turned the roads and fields into deep, slimy quagmires of Italian mud in which troops, jeeps, tanks, trucks, ambulances, and mules continuously floundered. Forward movement, entirely apart from the presence of the enemy, was becoming extremely difficult.

Part VI: *The Drive to the Apennines*

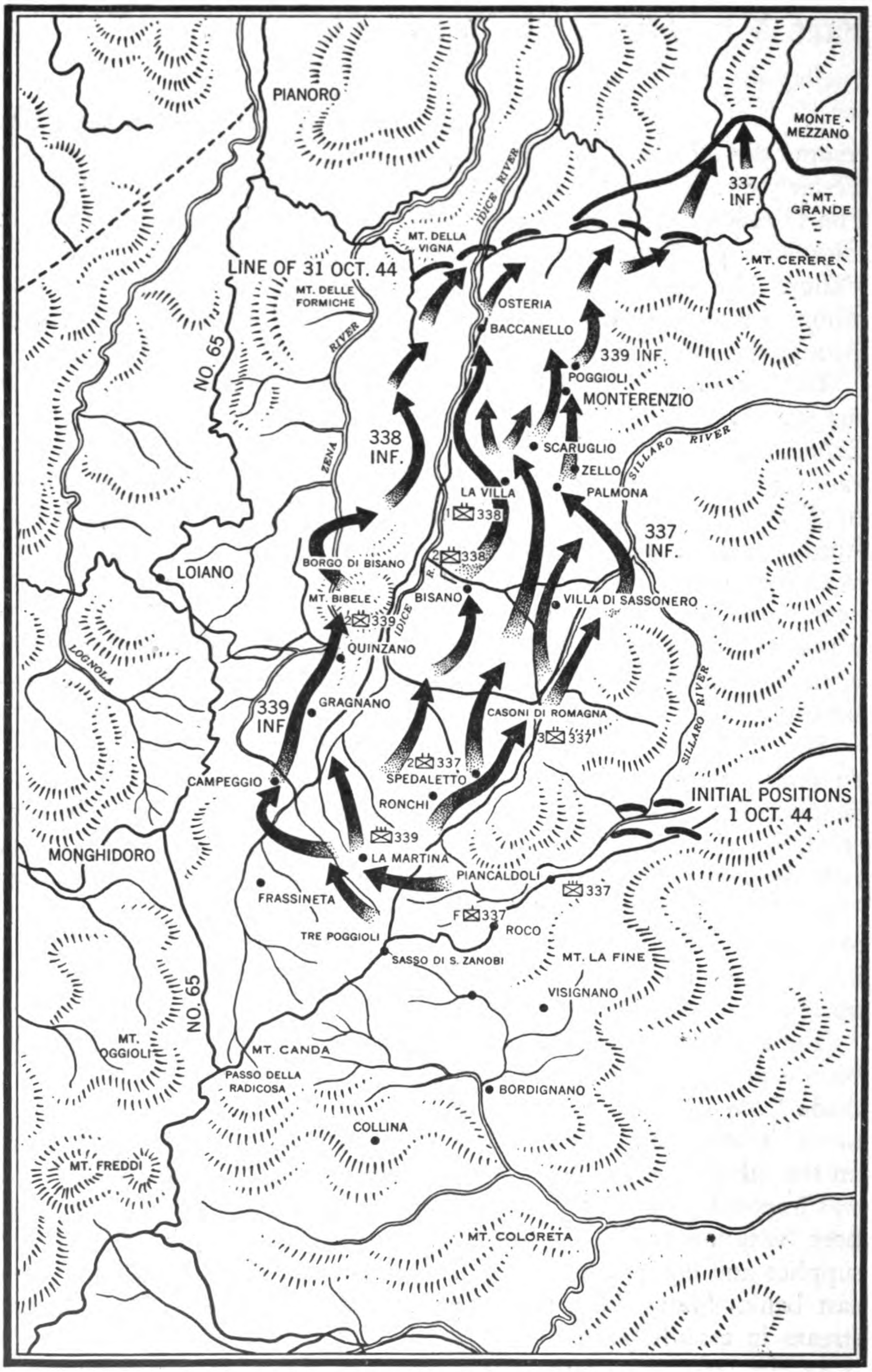
AS THE CUSTERMEN prepared to resume the offensive, the Division front extended from Belvedere in a westerly direction to Casa di Silva, a distance of about nine kilometers. The Division's sector of advance extended approximately twenty-seven kilometers north-northeast to the Via Emilia (Highway 9) in the Po Valley. The new attack was to be supported by the 756th Tank Battalion, the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 86th Fighter-Bomber Group, and the 77th Field Artillery Group.

The terrain still offered great difficulties, although it was not as rugged as the mountains in the Gothic Line. From the area of Mount Canda, extending to the Via Emilia, was a succession of steep hills varying from two to six hundred meters in elevation. They rose from small bases in steep, dome-like shapes with rock or clay cliffs falling from the peaks. The domed hills were so closely crowded together that from the sides and summit of one it was difficult to see more than the next immediate hills. This condition prevailed for some time, and it was not until Mount Bibele, Monterenzio, and Mount delle Formiche were reached that the Division secured mountains dominating a considerable area.

The roads, as usual, were second-class—not to be confused with American second-class roads. They ran north through the Division sector in the winding valley of the Torrente Idice. They were in poor condition as a result of the October rains, and quickly became seas of rich, deep mud. Sprinkled generously throughout the area were rough cart roads and goat trails which, in the slick, slimy mud, were impossible to negotiate with anything less sure-footed than an Arabian or Missouri mule. Even the latter had a difficult time moving and remaining upright.

The rains swelled the mountain streams and where before there had been a dry river bed or a small brook, there were now rushing rivers made from the rain which drained swiftly from the barren hills. At times, installations on one side of the Idice were isolated from units on the other side and the river frequently ran so full and swift that it was impossible to ford it. Toward the end of October the 310th Engineer Battalion had to construct an overhead tramway in order to get supplies and equipment across to the 310th Medical Battalion on the east bank. Many times the supplies were carried across the swollen stream in assault boats.

In the offensive about to be launched, the 85th Division was to attack across mountains and ridges overlooking these valleys with their



Map 12: ***The drive toward Bologna continues through mud, rain, and endless mountains.***
(Scale 1:200,000)

swollen streams. A few miles ahead, several mountain masses would be reached—Bibele, Formiche, and Monterenzio. Five miles beyond these was the last range of dominating hills before the Po Valley. These were Mount Fano, Castelvecchio, Mount Castellaro and Mount Grande.

Facing the Division in the attack were a considerable number of enemy units, although all of them were not at full strength. There were the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 131st Grenadier Regiment (44th Infantry Division) on the extreme right, northeast of Il Rio. Extending west were the 362d Infantry Division and the Lehr Brigade; the 2d Battalion, 956th Grenadier Regiment, north of La Gavina; the 1st Battalion, 1059th Grenadier Regiment, near the Sasso della Mantesca and the 1st Battalion, Lehr Brigade, northwest of that hill; the 2d Battalion, 1059th Grenadier Regiment, near Ronchi; the 2d Battalion, Lehr Brigade, near La Martina. On the extreme left were elements of the 1st Battalion, 1060th Grenadier Regiment, northeast of Campeggio. Elements of the 362d Fusilier Battalion were also near La Martina.

During the 85th Division's October offensive the enemy brought up a great number of replacements to make up his heavy losses in killed, wounded, and captured. Several units were relieved, others were reorganized, and new units were brought into the Division sector. The character of the enemy's resistance, however, remained the same. He fought stubborn delaying actions from fortified ridges and houses. He laid down heavy mortar and artillery fire in the draws and launched strong counterattacks after artillery preparations against any important objective seized by the 85th. With the arrival of each new group of enemy reinforcements, it became clear that the resistance was more stubborn and that the enemy had recovered from the confusion that followed the tremendous offensive which cracked the Gothic Line.

The 85th Division's attack was scheduled for 0600 hours, 1 October 1944, with the 337th and the 339th abreast and the 338th initially in Division reserve. The 337th's initial objective was Hill 751, the Casoni di Romagna, and the nearby trail junctions. Beyond this, about two kilometers, was the next objective, Villa di Sassonero. There were few roads or trails of any kind in the 337th's line of advance and the attack had to be made across hills and draws and a network of streams falling toward the Torrente Sillaro on the east.

The 339th was assigned the mission of taking Mount Bibele on the left of the Division sector. Apart from a fairly good valley road in the middle of the regimental sector—a road that came to a dead end at Frassinetta—there were only the usual narrow roads and trails crossing the sparsely covered hills.

Promptly on schedule, the Division attacked. The 3d Battalion of the 337th moved out swiftly and made some progress, but it finally was halted by very heavy enemy fire coming from the draws and strongpoints along the Spedaletto ridge. The advance of this battalion was held up for the rest of the day, but at nightfall the men moved forward again and reached a point less than a kilometer from the objective, Hill 751. By 0440 hours, 2 October, it had seized the objective.

The 337th's 2d Battalion also struck out vigorously toward the north in this new drive, but like the 3d Battalion it too was halted by intense hostile fire. The 2d Battalion was not stymied, however. A platoon of supporting tanks was called up and the infantrymen mounted them and moved forward again in the attack. They cleared the enemy from Il Caprullo ridge from which the fire had been coming, and in the afternoon went on to capture Spedaletto.

The 3d Battalion spent most of 2 October mopping up pockets of resistance made up of Germans fighting bitterly from numerous machine-gun positions, while the 2d Battalion which had moved from Spedaletto to positions on Hill 751, was counterattacked on that hill by an enemy force of over a hundred, made up of remnants of the 132d Grenadier Regiment. Defensive concentrations were laid down by 85th Division Artillery, and elements of the 2d and 3d Battalions teamed up to drive the Germans back.

This hill, 751—Casoni di Romagna—was not only the scene of some hard fighting, but it was yet another stage on which outstanding Custermen demonstrated their fighting ability. The capture of this objective in the first place was made possible largely through the heroic efforts of Pfc. William D. Francisco of Walton, New York, and its successful defense against enemy counterattack was aided tremendously by Staff Sgt. Edward R. Hargrave of Rice Lake, Wisconsin. Both men were from the 3d Battalion, 337th Infantry. Francisco's company was one of the units ordered to attack the German positions around Casoni di Romagna. The Nazis were really fighting back and they had succeeded in halting the company's forward platoon, using heavy machine-gun and mortar fire. Francisco, a machine gunner, was determined to relieve the situation. He maneuvered his weapon into position and let loose a tremendous, angry blast of fire at the enemy which neutralized a hostile machine gun and its three-man crew. The enemy was in such strength, however, that this achievement was not sufficient to enable his platoon to advance. Francisco set his teeth. With great effort, he dragged his gun more than a hundred yards through withering enemy machine-gun and mortar fire to a new position. Quickly he set up the gun. He banged the legs of the tripod into the earth, set the gun in

the cradle, adjusted the elevating and traversing mechanism and the sights, and loaded with a full belt of caliber .30 ammunition. Resuming fire, he neutralized yet another enemy machine gun and forced twenty Germans to flee in disorder. Francisco was severely wounded himself, but he remained in position and continued to fire at the enemy until he was sure that his comrades were able to advance. His wound later resulted in his death, but he had done his job magnificently. His courageous advance and his relentless determination to carry the fight to the enemy had given his platoon time to reorganize and inspiration to smash on and lead the company forward in a successful attack on the objective.

During the enemy counterattack which followed the capture of Casoni di Romagna, Staff Sergeant Hargrave took personal charge of the forward fighting area. The counterattack was so fierce that it could easily be termed suicidal, fanatical. A group of twenty Germans penetrated the Custer Division lines. Immediately, Hargrave courageously left his position to engage them in close combat. For a whole hour of bitter and desperate conflict, which included hand-to-hand battle, he was locked in a fierce fight with the enemy. He killed three and wounded one of the Germans, and threw the others into a state of confusion. His men dug in in a resolute defense and drove the rest of the counterattacking force off with heavy casualties. The 85th Division seemed to have a faculty for producing a determined fighting giant for every grave emergency with which it was threatened.

Francisco was awarded, posthumously, the Distinguished Service Cross, and Hargrave received the Silver Star.

To Hargrave's rear, while the counterattacking battle was raging, still another magnificent one-man battle was being fought. Sgt. Robert F. Hixon, of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, also a member of Company L, 337th Infantry, had discovered the presence of an enemy tank to the rear of the company's position. Strategically located enemy snipers were delivering heavy and accurate fire, but disregarding this danger, Hixon maneuvered to the tank and by firing antitank grenades, captured the tank and its four-man crew. He disarmed his prisoners and started them back toward his company command post. On the way, however, he encountered another tank. By maneuvering skillfully through the trees, he secured a position from which he could attack the second tank. He was again successful and captured this tank and its occupant. Hixon then took his five prisoners to the company command post, and through intense artillery and sniper fire he returned to the two tanks, which he rendered useless. Hixon's accomplishment, under intense enemy fire, was one of the most unusual deeds a Custerman had yet performed. It earned him the Distinguished Service Cross.

Throughout 3 October, the 337th continued its successful advance. The enemy kept up a persistent and determined resistance, however, and in addition he increased his artillery fire, laying down smashing concentrations in both the forward and the rear areas. By 4 October, however, the 337th had forced a salient well ahead of the forward elements of all other units of II Corps. Now from all sides—east, west and north—the regiment was receiving heavy fire from the enemy's self-propelled guns. This punishment did not stop the attack, however. The 337th kept on. Its 1st Battalion, on the left, advanced more than two kilometers to the northeast to capture Hill 587. It then pushed on along the ridge toward the north to a point just south of the village of Palmona. The 2d and 3d Battalions also moved forward. The enemy's artillery concentrations falling in the regimental sector were now so intense that the Division Artillery commander, Brig.Gen. Pierre Mallett, ordered a special counterbattery program undertaken to neutralize the enemy's guns.

The Germans had received considerable reinforcements by this time and Marshal Kesselring was making a strong stand. The nearer the Custermen came to the Po Valley, the Nazis' last great possession in Italy, the more vicious were the enemy's counterattacks and general defense actions. On 5 October the 337th moved some of its forces near Sassonero to be in position to protect its right flank. This was in the morning. In the afternoon, the Germans laid down a fifteen-minute artillery and mortar preparation and followed it with a counterattack in company strength against the right flank of the 1st Battalion southeast of Palmona. The men of the 1st Battalion fought furiously and, with the aid of defensive artillery fires and long-range machine-gun fire, they repulsed the attack. During that night, although the men were dog-tired and had been counterattacked and pounded by the enemy's artillery and mortars for five days, swift but careful preparations were made to continue the attack the next day.

During these five days the 339th Infantry had also been advancing and, like the 337th, had found the going very tough. The enemy was fighting hard. When the attack was launched on 1 October, the 339th struck out toward the north to capture its objective, Mount Bibele. The 3d Battalion, on the right, captured Hill 886, just north of the Sasso della Mantesca, and north of the road leading to Spedaletto. The 2d Battalion ran into particularly heavy resistance. During the attack from positions south of Osteria and west of La Martina, it became evident that several nearby villages would have to be cleared of the enemy before the general advance could continue. La Martina and Casa di Silva were first on the list. La Martina was a small hillside town, a cluster of

thick-walled stone houses which were jammed close together overlooking narrow, winding roads thick with deep, slimy, sticky mud. Behind the protection of the stone walls, the Germans set up their strongpoints and prepared to resist the advance of the 339th. Colonel Brady's men, however, would not be denied. The going was terrible; the mud and rain and cold, in addition to the enemy's mortar, artillery, machine-gun, and sniper fire, made up an abominable combination of misery. The Gothic Line–Northern Apennines fight had turned into a bitter, backbreaking battle. Troops were near exhaustion. Supplies were coming through to the fighting men, but only because of the devoted, prodigious effort of the supply men and the engineers. The whole world, it seemed, was an endless chain of steep, muddy, trackless mountains. But the fight must go on. Somewhere there must be an end to these eternal hills. It couldn't rain forever. Sometime the mud had to dry up. Somewhere there were broad, flat, fertile valleys. Some day there would be sunshine—sunshine not only on the land but in the hearts of men. This misery and hardship and suffering and exhaustion and death had to end. Until the enemy was soundly defeated, however, it would not. Attack, attack, and attack again seemed to be the only answer.

The men of the 339th Infantry smashed into La Martina and captured it. During the night the bitter fighting went on. Battles raged at Osteria and Molino della Pergola. On 2 October, Osteria fell to the 2d Battalion, while the 3d Battalion pushed on to take Colle de Tattini, rising from the east bank of the Torrente Idice.

It is a cold statement of historical fact that Colle de Tattini was captured by the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry. But it does not do justice to the extraordinary heroism of the man whose fearless aggressiveness was chiefly responsible for the victory. Few people in the world ever heard of Colle de Tattini. Like many of the other hills and hillside towns of the Northern Apennines it had passed through stormy as well as quiet centuries in obscurity. The mere fact, however, that the names of places where battles were fought were unfamiliar did not mean that the battles were unimportant, or that the enemy was not there in strength, or that men did not suffer and die there in great numbers. Without the bitter fights for unknown hilltops, history would not have recorded the surrender of a million Germans in Northern Italy in 1945. And without the individual acts of courage and initiative on the part of the attacking Allies, the hilltop battles would never have been won.

Such was the significance of Colle de Tattini, a strategically important hill town which was strongly defended and which was the key to the enemy defense in that area. Company I, 339th Infantry, was part of the

attacking force ordered to seize this position. The commander of Company I was a short fellow of boundless energy who took great pride in the accomplishment of difficult tasks. During mountain training near St. Denis-du-Sig, in Africa, he delighted in astounding his associates by taking off across country over the mountains in a ten- to fifteen-mile forced march in record time. He was Capt. Clayton N. Little, from Bentonville, Arkansas.

When a platoon of his company was halted by heavy artillery, mortar, and machine-gun fire in the assault on hill positions overlooking Colle de Tattini, Little led the remainder of his men in an attack across seven hundred yards of open terrain. So swift and aggressive and startling was this attack that it enabled Company I to capture this objective and the surrounding defenses. Captain Little had no sooner organized his men on the newly won hilltop when he discovered that the main enemy line of resistance was on the reverse slope of two adjacent ridges. He attacked at once. In the face of deadly machine-gun fire, he led a group of thirty men in an attack across fifty yards of open ground and forced the Germans to withdraw from their positions. This was not done as quickly or as easily as it is related. There was sharp, hard fighting and, during this assault, Captain Little personally killed fifteen Germans. Night brought some respite, but little relief from the enemy's fire or from plans for the next attack. The following morning Captain Little was ordered to capture the village of Colle de Tattini. The men were tired but they moved out in the offensive quickly. Little deployed his company and led it along the crest of a heavily defended ridge in a bold attack on the town. Taking advantage of the little concealment available, his men pushed forward. The enemy was surprised, but he fought back. A prolonged, sharp exchange of fire followed. Captain Little was everywhere, ordering, urging, and leading his men on. The speed and unexpectedness of the assault, combined with the skillful, furious fighting of Company I's commander, proved the deciding factor. Fifty Germans were killed and sixty captured. Captain Little, alone, killed twenty of the fifty.

Little organized his company once again and the men dug in in defense positions and established an observation post in a house. Before many minutes had passed, five enemy tanks began firing on the company's newly won position. Again Little took charge. He ordered his men to take cover while he called back for artillery fire. Remaining exposed in a position from which he could observe, he directed the artillery fire on the tanks until they were forced to withdraw. For his courage, initiative, and calmness under fire, Captain Little was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

While Little was making himself a hornet in the enemy's trousers, not far away on the same day, 2 October, Lt. James L. Mulcahy heroically sacrificed his life in the successful attack by the 2d Battalion, 339th Infantry, on Osteria. Mulcahy, a platoon leader in Company E, came from Taunton, Massachusetts, and was a graduate of Notre Dame University. He was a husky, pleasant-faced man, customarily mild in manner, yet at the same time emphatic in his views. He was an able leader, constantly considerate of the needs and comfort of his men. An hour before the attack in which he lost his life he was talking to three other men of the 339th—two officers and a sergeant. "My men want news," he said. "After thirty or forty days of this kind of hard fighting in isolated, barren mountains, men lose perspective. They need tangible reasons to justify all this prolonged misery and death. They want to know what is going on in the outside world, in other theaters of combat. They want to know when the war is going to end. I think Army newspapers and news sheets ought to come up by mule pack with the food and ammunition."

A short time later he was leading his platoon in the attack on Osteria. Accurate, heavy fire from two well placed enemy machine guns held up the advance. Without hesitation, Mulcahy moved aggressively forward a hundred yards over the fire-swept terrain to a position from which he could direct supporting mortars in neutralizing the positions. The spot he selected offered excellent observation but it exposed him to the fire of the strong enemy forces holding this commanding position. The enemy guns had to be knocked out at once, however, if his men were not to suffer casualties. So he remained there and successfully directed the mortar fire to destroy one of the machine-gun nests. Before he could eliminate the other, however, he was hit and fatally wounded by hostile fire. Lieutenant Mulcahy was awarded the Silver Star for his gallantry, which inspired the members of his platoon to their utmost in overcoming the strong resistance that remained before Osteria was taken.

It was now 3 October 1944, and Fifth Army's relentless drive across the cold, muddy, rain-drenched Northern Apennines was, from the Nazis' viewpoint, coming dangerously close to the Po Valley. German resistance stiffened all along the line, for the loss of Northern Italy would be a serious blow to the entire, hard-pressed German war effort.

The 339th continued its advance on 3 October and, struggling against the growing enemy opposition, reached positions from which it could advance on Mount Bibele. The approach to Bibele, along the hills west of the Idice, had been cleared by the 2d Battalion, which captured La Pozza, Gragnano, and Quinzano.

Mount Bibele, a sprawling, rocky mass, defended by German small-arms, machine guns and mortars, dominated the Idice Valley in this area. Cutting the mountain deeply were ravines and gorges, and blocking most of its approaches were sheer cliffs. At 0700 hours, 4 October, the new attack began. The 1st Battalion advanced east of the mountain along the right of the regimental sector. The 2d headed directly for the hill mass. Lt.Col. Dick Webster's 1st Battalion moved swiftly against medium resistance and took Hill 504 early in the morning. The 2d Battalion, under Lt.Col. Charles Mudgett, struck sharp, stiff resistance from the Quinzano area, south of the base of the mountain and San Martino, southwest of the base. Mudgett called for tanks to aid in the reduction of enemy resistance in these villages. A pitched battle followed. By mid-afternoon the enemy defenses at Quinzano had fallen to the Custermen, but San Martino held out. On into the cold, drizzling, dark night went the battle. But now not only was San Martino under assault, Bibele itself was feeling the fire of the 2d Battalion's weapons and of the guns of Division Artillery. The fighting lasted all night, but the enemy was stubborn, and the 339th could make little progress. The Germans were now holding on tenaciously to every conceivable vantage point to keep the Allied tide from pouring into the Po Valley.

The 339th finally received some relief on 4-5 October when the 1st and 3d Battalions were relieved by elements of the 338th Infantry. The 2d Battalion, 339th, was ordered to continue the attack on Bibele until that feature should be taken. Control of the 339th zone passed to the commanding officer, 338th Infantry, at 0430 hours, 5 October.

The enemy was still entrenched on San Martino on the morning of 5 October. He also held positions on Hills 542 and 561, on the ridge leading from the south to the peak of Bibele. The 2d Battalion resumed its attack and the fight went on without let-up during the morning and well into the afternoon. By late afternoon, the 2d Battalion had one company on top of the mountain, and San Martino joined the long list of stubbornly surrendered enemy strongpoints in the bleak Northern Apennines. The exhausted 2d Battalion men remained on Bibele until the afternoon of the next day when, after being relieved, they dragged their weary bodies back down the mountain side to rejoin the rest of the 339th in Division reserve.

The Custermen of Colonel Mikkelsen's 338th Infantry took over the Division objectives formerly assigned to the 339th Infantry and moved up to assault the next enemy position, Castelnuovo di Bisano. This strongpoint lay beyond Bibele and on a prominent ridge west of the Torrente Idice. The Germans here had positions which commanded wide fields of fire, covering effectively the approaches to the heights.

By dawn on 6 October the 1st Battalion, 338th, had pushed on from positions near Boschi and had advanced along the high ground in the extreme left of the 337th's zone; the 3d Battalion was on Bibele preparing to move forward. A tank company, with supporting tank destroyer elements, was now in support of the advancing 338th.

The assault now in progress was the first of a series of attacks made by the 85th Division during the final phase of the great Northern Apennines offensive. In this period, tremendous battles raged on obscure, unknown mountains and in villages unheard of before in the outside world. The Germans were making a final, desperate stand in this belt of mountains before Bologna and the Po Valley and they were pouring reinforcements into their defense area daily. Even more than the enemy, however, factors that were contributing to the general slowing down of the great Fifth and Eighth Armies' offensives were, as the British put it, "The frightful terrain and weather and the beastly roads." Moreover, on top of the steady increase in casualties and the lack of adequate replacements, large numbers of the Allied troops were hospitalized for a combination of high fever and severe and prolonged attacks of diarrhea. The men were out in the mud and the rain most of the time, lying in dirty, water-filled foxholes. They considered themselves fortunate when they had the damp, stone floor of a dirty, three-walled bombed-out barn on which to sleep. Practically every company was severely hit by these non-battle casualties. As an indication of the extent of the sickness, in one company of close to 150 men, thirty-eight were, not present for duty because of hospitalization for fever and diarrhea. The burden on the men who remained and continued to fight in many cases practically doubled and in some cases tripled. One lieutenant of the 339th Infantry, who was the only platoon leader left in his company, had to go out on patrol three successive nights. Many noncoms and men of other ranks found themselves on patrol two and three times as frequently as they were accustomed to or normally would be expected to be out. More and more, in these final Northern Apennines offensives, the Custermen found their attacking forces outnumbered by the enemy defenders. In the face of such tremendous obstacles, it was unbelievable that Fifth Army was even engaged in offensive effort, to say nothing of its being successful in steadily and persistently driving the enemy back up the mountainous boot of Italy toward Austria and Germany. Many of the things that Fifth Army did were startling military accomplishments, but this final phase of the Northern Apennines offensive was second to none, in that, in spite of abominable conditions for the attack, General Clark's forces carried the fight to the enemy and, day after day, continued to defeat him, attacking

him with great violence and forcing him to give up precious terrain.

The 7th of October 1944 dawned dull and rainy. Slogging through the mud, the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, captured Mandreazza and La Civetta, but found the advance on La Villa difficult and costly. The battalion's advance here was in the teeth of extremely heavy enemy artillery and mortar concentrations. The Germans were strongly entrenched in numerous houses and the terrain over which the Custermen had to go to get at them and dig them out offered very little cover.

The course of the 2d Battalion was generally along the Idice River bed. On the 7th, the men of this battalion occupied Bisano and Borgo di Bisano, a small town east of the stream. The 3d Battalion also made progress, moving north from Bibele to seize localities south of Castelnuovo di Bisano and other ground to the west of there, near Casone.

Corinth, Kentucky, was the home town of the soldier whose actions were largely responsible for the capture of Bisano. He was Pfc. Gordon R. True. The initial mission of his platoon was to capture and secure a house in the right sector of an important ridge near Bisano. The attack had only moved a short distance when the fire of enemy riflemen and machine gunners made a successful advance impossible without some quick and drastic action. True supplied that action, unassisted. He dashed boldly across fifty yards of open ground, firing as he advanced, and running the gantlet of the hail of fire poured out by the Germans. In this perilous rush to his platoon's objective, True's accurate fire accounted for two enemy dead. He had just reached the side of the house when he spotted three Germans advancing stealthily toward him over a small mound. He swung about swiftly, took quick aim with his submachine gun, and fired a few bursts. All three of the enemy were killed. Tense, True looked about for further signs of the Nazis. In a few minutes he discovered forty of them forming for a counterattack. True took off at once, leaving the slight cover afforded by the house. Enemy machine guns were now firing steadily, but through it all True ran thirty-five yards in order to get to a better position from which he could meet the attack. He opened up at once, laying down a heavy volume of accurate fire; but the enemy continued to advance toward him. True was hard pressed, but he stuck it out and won. The Germans were thrown into confusion by his persistent, daring, accurate fire. Six more of them were killed or wounded and the rest withdrew. True's platoon moved forward and secured its objective, and True's name was added to the growing list of names of Custermen awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. It was this type of skillful, fearless fighting that helped immeasurably to make the 85th the distinguished combat division that it was.

Throughout 7 October the 338th met stiff resistance, which was increased by the presence of mines on the side roads. The 338th's task was a tough one. The enemy hung on desperately and he had to be cleared from each of the scattered farmhouses by the infantrymen with the aid of their supporting tank and tank destroyer elements. The 1st Battalion seized hills west and northwest of La Civetta and the 3d Battalion captured Suniano and several hills in its advance on Castelnuovo di Bisano from the west. On the following day, the 3d Battalion took still more hills west of the Idice, while the 1st Battalion captured high ground northwest of La Civetta. The Germans were frantically trying to hold a line in this area on ridges west of Castelnuovo di Bisano, but the steady pressure of the 338th Infantry was gradually forcing them back. They lost Villa di Cassano and La Villa on 9 October and were forced to fall back to the next line of commanding terrain features—Formiche on the left and the ridge running from Fiumetto to La Torre and Casone on the right.

In the meantime, during 6, 7 and 8 October, the 337th Infantry was engaged in clearing the enemy immediately to its front while it prepared for the attack on the Monterenzio mass. Colonel Hughes, whose regiment was now receiving maximum support from the 752d Tank Battalion and the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, placed elements of his 2d and 3d Battalions in positions protecting the regiment's right flank. He sent elements of the 3d Battalion forward on 6 October to Villa di Sassonero. On 7 October the 3d Battalion went on to clear the ridge from Hill 407 northeast to Il Poggere. This was ground the enemy had decided he did not want to lose. Promptly on schedule, therefore, he counterattacked viciously. Some ground was lost but the position, generally, was held. The counterattack was broken up chiefly through the smashing volume of accurate fire laid down by the 337th's Cannon Company, but no small part of the credit for thwarting the Germans here belongs to a private from Hardy, Arkansas.

Private Barton H. Wilkerson, an automatic rifleman in Company L, was occupying a forward position when the counterattack struck. He could have withdrawn to comparative safety, but he chose to remain at his post. In the face of the heavy fire of the attacking forces, he directed a deadly hail of fire into the enemy ranks, killing six German soldiers, wounding others, and causing the enemy to withdraw. The Germans attacked a second and a third time, and at last succeeded in getting close enough to attack with hand grenades. One of the grenades destroyed Wilkerson's rifle, but instead of giving up or retreating, he seized a rifle from one of his wounded comrades and resumed firing

upon the still advancing Nazis. He stood his ground and continued to inflict casualties on the enemy until he was fatally wounded by their intense fire. He was awarded the Silver Star.

The Custer Division had now smashed its way forward to a point thirteen miles from the outskirts of Bologna and eleven and a quarter miles from the Rimini–Bologna highway, southeast of Bologna. General Coulter's men were posing a grave threat to the rear of the German troops battling to hold Eighth Army which was fanning out from the southeast corner of the Po Valley. British, Indian and Polish troops of Eighth Army had a bare foothold in the valley but at right angles to their line of advance was a succession of swollen streams to cross and between the streams were muddy marshlands. Although progress was slow, they were advancing. The Germans didn't like it, for, between Eighth and Fifth Armies, they were beginning to be boxed in at that corner of the valley.

As the advance against Marshal Kesselring's fôrces continued on 8 October, the 85th Reconnaissance Troop was attached to the 337th Infantry and ordered forward to protect the Division's right flank and maintain contact with the 88th Division.

The 337th had now felt out the enemy's next line of defenses, but General Coulter ordered the attack on the Monterenzio mass postponed until the regiment's exposed flanks were covered by the advance of adjacent units. Preparations for the offensive, however, were increased. The 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, was attached to the 337th to aid in the blow. Intelligence knew that Hill 578 was strongly defended by a large force. This hill, dominating the mass, was the center of a system of defenses extending along the ridge from Scaruglio through Palazzo to Poggioli.

In spite of illness, casualties, and lack of replacements, which plagued the Division, it was a sizable and powerful striking force, supported by artillery and tanks, which launched the offensive against the Monterenzio mass on 9 October. There were three battalions abreast, with one in reserve. On the right was the 3d Battalion; in the center was the 1st Battalion; and on the left was the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry. The 2d Battalion of the 337th was in reserve. The attack was immediately met by enemy machine-gun fire. The Germans also laid down heavy mortar barrages and stubbornly resisted all advances toward Palmona and La Villa. All through the day and night the battle raged. Just before dawn, the slugging 1st Battalion of the 338th Infantry captured Hill 452 and La Villa. As the battle went on during the night,

reports coming in indicated that the Germans were somewhat weaker on the left side of Colonel Hughes' sector, so he ordered his 2d Battalion moved up during the night for an attack in that area.

This assault on Monterenzio now became part of a general II Corps coordinated attack launched on 10 October by the 91st, 85th and 88th Divisions. The Divisions were aligned on the ground in that order, with the 91st on the left. The 88th was to aid the advance of the 85th by seizing prominent ridges east of the sector of advance of the 85th. The 91st was also to assist the Custer Division by taking the ridge west of Mount delle Formiche. After the capture of Formiche by the 85th, the 91st Division was to be prepared to outflank Livergnano, on Highway 65, from the east. The maximum air effort was to be made, with emphasis on targets in the 85th and 88th Division zones.

The mission of the 337th Infantry, attacking on the right in the 85th Division's sector, in this coordinated corps attack, was to capture Hill 578 on Monterenzio and Hill 622 and Hill 602 in the vicinity of Santa Anna, four kilometers to the northeast. The 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, was still attached to the 337th. The rest of the 338th Infantry, attacking on the left in the Division's sector, would make its main effort, initially, to capture Mount delle Formiche.

The Germans had been rapidly massing strength and were now concentrated to defend Formiche and Monterenzio. Allied intelligence had made recent identifications of the German 98th and 65th Infantry Divisions in these areas.

The 337th Infantry attacked promptly at 0800 hours, 10 October, with four battalions abreast, from right to left: 3d Battalion, 1st Battalion, 1st Battalion of the 338th, and 2d Battalion. The plan was for part of this attacking force to move around the right of Monterenzio to cut off reinforcements to the garrison on the crest, while other elements attacked frontally and to the left. The heavy rains continued, making a sea of mud and preventing the use of tanks initially in the drive.

The 337th had its task cut out. Monterenzio, 1,800 feet high, was a rugged, barren mass of mountain which commanded the entire area between the Idice and Sillaro Rivers. From Hill 258, about a mile south of the crest, a narrow ridge led through the small village of Scaruglio to the summit. The sides of this ridge fell off in a drop of four hundred feet over precipitous, rocky ravines to mountain streams which wound their way through thick, tangled brush. The western side of the mountain was one wall of a ravine, while the eastern side fell off in steep, forbidding cliffs. Palmona and Zello were two mountain villages south and southeast of Monterenzio. Scaruglio was at

the center of the enemy line of defense which ran along the east of the mountain to Poggioli and along the west to the Liano ridge.

The 1st Battalion, 337th, drove hard toward Palmona and two hills to the north of it, just south of the Monterenzio slopes, Hills 528 and 409. Palmona held out the whole day, but a smart, quick attack by Company A of the 337th, which by-passed the strongpoint of Palmona, took Hill 528 in a surprising blow which caught the enemy defenders of the hill completely off guard. So unexpected and skillful was the assault that the hill was taken without the enemy firing a shot. This was an important achievement and the enemy showed his chagrin by immediately intensifying his artillery fire.

The 3d Battalion also made some progress and reached positions near Zello. Staff Sgt. James H. Roberts of that battalion was one of the leading figures in the attack. Roberts, who hailed from East St. Louis, Illinois, was a member of Company L. His platoon, occupying a strategic ridge near Zello, found itself badly harassed by strong enemy forces dug in on the forward slope. He volunteered to assist in neutralizing the enemy positions. Roberts crawled out over the crest of the ridge, an extremely dangerous act, and moved aggressively down the slope until he reached a position from which he could engage the well emplaced Germans in a fight. He destroyed a machine-gun nest by accurate rifle fire and the use of hand grenades and captured two German soldiers. Then, taking his prisoners, he returned to his platoon. There he reorganized his squad and placed it in a position to cover the forward slope, thereby assuring the successful defense of this valuable position. Roberts was killed in a later engagement, and was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

About the same time, near Il Poggere, southeast of Zello, Tech. Sgt. Clarence Bishop was winning himself the Distinguished Service Cross. Bishop, later promoted to second lieutenant, was a native of San Antonio, Texas. During the advance of the 3d Battalion toward Il Poggere and Zello, Bishop's platoon leader became a casualty. At once, Bishop took charge of the platoon and led an advance toward enemy positions on the high ground on the southwest side of the hill mass at Il Poggere. The approaches to this mass from the south and southwest were gradual, the enemy was well emplaced, and he had good observation for artillery and mortars and good fields of fire for rifles and machine guns. The enemy's mortar, artillery, machine-gun and sniper fire were so fierce that Bishop's platoon was stopped about two hundred yards short of its objective. Bishop was an aggressive man, impatient of delay, whose military philosophy was "hit the enemy hard and fast and you can beat him." He acted at once. Having directed his platoon guide to take

charge of the platoon, he moved forward alone under fire from three enemy machine guns to the front, two enemy machine guns to the rear, and long-range machine-gun fire from the left. He advanced precariously to a draw which he followed for a short distance. Then he dashed across twenty yards of open ground to reach a shallow ditch. He worked his way stealthily toward an enemy emplacement. Suddenly, rising to a crouch, he fired and killed one member of the enemy machine-gun crew. The remaining Germans ducked and scrambled for cover. Having gained the initiative, Bishop pressed his attack vigorously. He rose and quickly assaulted the emplacement, killing two more members of the crew and capturing the remaining two occupants. Now, with his two captives before him as a shield, he moved on swiftly to the next enemy emplacement. The Germans here were surprised and startled by the swiftness and daring of Bishop's attack and they were, for a moment, reluctant to fire on their own men. However, Bishop gave them no time to decide what to do. He advanced aggressively, firing his weapon as he went, and succeeded in capturing all the crew members and their weapon intact. For most men this would have been a good, hair-raising day's work, but Bishop wasn't through yet. Rounding up his prisoners and prodding them on before him, he took off for yet another enemy machine-gun nest. For the second time, his amazing stratagem worked and he succeeded in taking a third enemy machine gun and its crew. Bishop had killed three and captured nine of the enemy, captured three enemy machine guns intact, and secured the platoon objective.

In the meantime, on the left, the advance of the 2d Battalion, 337th, was being closely coordinated with that of the 1st Battalion, 338th. These elements, advancing toward objectives west of Monterenzio, captured three positions on the southwest slopes: Hill 349, Molinetto, on the east bank of the Idice, and Hill 362 on the east. The Germans again exhibited their sensitiveness at the loss of important ground. Very heavy artillery concentrations now fell on the newly occupied positions.

At 0700 hours, 11 October, Colonel Hughes' attacking force resumed its drive, still with four battalions abreast. The men again fought all day—long, hard, bitter combat. By nightfall, however, the 3d Battalion had captured the strongpoint of Zello from which the enemy's machine-gun fire had held up the advance for two days. After a bitterly contested, all-day battle, Liano fell to the 2d Battalion, which then reverted to Division reserve upon relief by elements of the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry. The 1st Battalion took Hill 572, the southern crest of the mass dominated by Hill 578, and went on to clear the enemy from positions on the peak west of Liano and from Hill 520.

These were important gains, but the enemy had not yet lost the fight for Monterenzio, and he knew it. He continued and intensified his mortar and artillery fire against every Custer Division advancing force trying to worm its way over steep, muddy hills and draws. By now, American tanks had worked their way up through the mud and their fire was brought to bear on Hill 578. Yet even this added power was of no avail. The enemy, composed here of elements of the 117th and 147th Grenadier Regiments, held their positions and the 1st Battalion could make no headway. Advance elements of the battalion reached a small church below the crest of the mountain, but the enemy laid down such intense machine-gun and mortar fire that not only were these elements trapped temporarily, but other troops were unable to bring aid to them. The 3d Battalion, however, made significant progress. It moved from positions north of Zello over rough terrain to capture Hill 418. At dark, it then swung to the right of Hill 578 and captured and occupied the village of Poggioli.

The usual counterattack was not long in materializing. The Germans wanted Poggioli back and they were really going after it. The blow was heavy and vicious. In fact, the enemy attack was so determined that a breakthrough appeared imminent at one point. At this moment, however, Cpl. Hugh A. Carmichael, of Indianola, Nebraska, who had been conserving his dwindling supply of ammunition, opened fire. Carmichael, then a private first class, had remained alone at his gun to face the advancing enemy. He waited tensely as the attacking force drew closer and closer. Then he opened up with withering blasts, firing until his ammunition was exhausted. He killed ten and wounded twenty-five of the enemy. Now he was without machine-gun ammunition and was armed only with an automatic pistol. A force of fifteen armed Germans was moving toward him. Should he pull out and save himself? He had done a good day's work with his light machine gun. Who would rebuke him for having withdrawn to a more favorable position in the face of enemy strength which outnumbered him fifteen to one? The reasoning was good, but Carmichael could not convince himself that he should leave. The 85th had come a long way to get this far, and he wasn't going to give an inch without a fight. He held his ground. The Germans advanced slowly, cautiously. He held his fire until the nearest German approached to a point within fifteen feet of him. Then, opening fire, he killed five more of the enemy. The other ten Germans, unnerved by his quick, deadly fire, surrendered to him. Carmichael rounded them up at once and marched them to his company command post. Then he replenished his supply of ammunition and returned to his machine gun to continue the defense of Poggioli. The breakthrough

had been prevented, however, and the position was now secure. Carmichael's fighting determination won him the Distinguished Service Cross.

The capture and successful defense of Poggioli cut the only road leading north from the Monterenzio crest, so the men of the 3d Battalion now dug in here swiftly. They were in a position to prevent the enemy from bringing up replacements and supplies to his forces on the mountain.

On 12 October, after many days of hard fighting while attached to the 337th Infantry, the 1st Battalion of the 338th was relieved and reverted to its own regiment. This was 12 October—Columbus Day of 1944—but it was doubtful if anyone gave it a thought. It was just another day of fighting, another day of hardship, another day of rain and mud and shells. The Custermen were too deep in the thick of the heavy fighting for the security of their homes and the continued safety of their country to pay tribute to Columbus, who in 1493 wrote about the newly discovered land: "This is a land to be desired . . . and once seen, never to be relinquished." Now, in the closing phases of the Northern Apennines offensive, although the men of the 85th knew that some day the war would be won by the United Nations, they could not tell how soon the oppressive burdens of war—the cold and the rain, the shelling and the bombing, the dirt, the mud, the dust, exhaustion, wounds, and death—would be lifted from them. It was a tribute to the magnificent training, the team spirit, and the men themselves that the 85th, in the face of such obstacles, continued to attack with vigor and with repeated success.

After the capture of Hill 572 by the 1st Battalion, 337th, the enemy levelled heavy machine-gun fire at both flanks of the battalion, but the Germans' pressure was successfully resisted and the hill was held. During the night, elements of the battalion attacked north and northwest to capture Hills 471 and 468, along the road which approaches Monterenzio from the west.

By 13 October, companies from the 2d and 3d Battalions had moved to positions to protect the right flank of the regiment and two companies of the 3d Battalion were firmly dug in at Poggioli. Now against the enemy's last, bitter resistance, the troops of the 337th began to converge on the remaining defenders. Tanks supported the 1st Battalion as it attacked Hill 578 from the northeast, the south, and the west. Two companies, swinging wide to the right, attacked from the northeast and gained a measure of surprise. Late in the morning the 1st Battalion and its supporting tanks overran the hill, killing large numbers of the enemy

and taking twenty-three prisoners. Most of the original force of three German companies defending the hill were dead.

Early on the morning of 14 October, the 339th Infantry relieved the 337th, passing through the forward elements to continue the attack toward the north. The battle for Monterenzio had been bitter and sustained, but there was more of the same kind of fighting to come.

While the struggle for Monterenzio was going on, the forces advancing along the Idice were meeting like resistance. When Mount Bibele fell on 5 October, the Germans fell back to several dominating ridges running west of the Idice. On these positions, they planned further delaying actions as a preliminary to another major stand on Mount delle Formiche, a 2,000-foot mountain which rose from the west bank of the Idice, about two miles northwest of Monterenzio. Formiche was formidable because of the steep cliffs which fell away from all sides except the south. It was also valuable to the enemy, and would be, of course, to the 85th, because it commanded Highway 65 in the sector of the 91st Division on the left, as well as the Idice Valley road.

Company K, 339th, was attached to the 338th to add weight to the assault, and by 10 October the 338th had taken and secured positions at the base of Formiche. By 11 October, fortified houses along the approach to Formiche were cleared by the combined action of strong elements of the 3d and 2d Battalions. In fact, one company of the 2d Battalion fought its way through desperate opposition to reach the crest of Formiche. Driven from their valuable position, the Germans launched two vicious counterattacks, but the Custermen, although suffering very heavy losses, refused to give up the ground won. The rest of the 2d Battalion then moved up to secure these new positions.

The ground secured by the 338th at the foot of Formiche was won after a bitter fight and was successfully held in the face of a furious and sustained German counterattack. Lt. Chester Loss was largely responsible for the successful defense. When the attack began, Loss, then a staff sergeant, commanded two squads occupying positions in a partially destroyed building. The Germans preceded their counterattack with a vicious mortar barrage. As long as the Custermen who were defending had ammunition, each enemy assault was repulsed, but the ammunition supply finally ran low. The only way to get more in a hurry was for someone to make his way along a route covered with intense small-arms and automatic fire. Lieutenant Loss took off at once. On his way he discovered two Germans manning a rocket launcher. He fired at once and killed them both. Then, as six other Germans appeared, he threw hand grenades with great accuracy and succeeded in routing them. He reached the ammunition supply and loaded himself with all he could

carry. Then he returned to his men and continued to direct the fight. Loss made three more perilous trips along this route to obtain ammunition for his men. Finally the Custermen's accurate fire forced the enemy to withdraw to covered positions. Loss, however, was not satisfied with a successful defense. He went over to the offensive on his own. Dashing through deadly automatic fire to a building occupied by Germans, he threw a hand grenade through a window and, almost immediately after it exploded, rushed through a door. There wasn't a German to be seen; they had escaped through the back door. Without delay, however, Loss continued the pursuit. He engaged in a fight with three of the enemy whom he spotted in a nearby building. After a sharp exchange of fire, all three of the Germans fell dead. Loss then discovered an enemy machine-gun nest concealed in a haystack. Levelling his submachine gun, he fired into the haystack. He silenced the gun and killed the four members of the gun crew. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

The 338th's drive against enemy positions on and around Formiche was making progress, but it needed more power. General Coulter ordered a battalion of the 339th attached to it. On 11 October, the 3d Battalion, 339th, joined the fight. Company F of the 339th relieved Company K of that regiment.

While the 2d Battalion was consolidating positions on Formiche, the 3d Battalion moved to positions below its eastern slopes. The enemy, however, was strongly entrenched here, being barricaded and protected in the cellars of stone houses. The enemy's mortar and artillery fire in this area quickly became so strong that the 3d Battalion was forced to take cover. Later in the day, however, supported by tanks which maneuvered miraculously along the cliffs to Hill 525, elements of the battalion swung along the north ridge of Formiche, taking Hill 488 and, to the northeast of this high ground, Hill 475.

Moving out of division reserve on the night of 13-14 October, Colonel Brady's 339th Infantry swung into action. It took over the right regimental sector of the Division zone from the 337th. The Polar Bears struck forward sharply toward the next objectives, Hills 602 and 622 near Santa Anna. The 1st Battalion, which had relieved elements of the 337th at Poggioli, and the 2d Battalion, which had relieved more of the 337th on Monterenzio, suddenly hit hard, stubborn resistance.

Hill 518 was now obviously the center of German resistance in this area. On 14 October, the 339th's 1st Battalion secured positions to the east of it in the vicinity of Migliarina and Colle di Piazza. The 2d

Battalion struck out directly toward 518, while the 3d Battalion, detached from the 338th, remained in reserve, guarding the Division's right flank.

The 339th Infantry was now fighting hard to clear the way for the attack on Hill 518. The 1st Battalion spent 15 October mopping up scattered resistance in the Colle di Piazza area and on Hill 515. By afternoon, the 2d Battalion had captured Casa Nova. When darkness fell, the 1st Battalion launched an attack against Hill 622 and Hill 602, the dominant heights in the regimental zone. The 3d Battalion was now committed and was assigned the task of moving along the high ground to Hill 503, north of Migliarina, then across country to Hill 571. The 3d Battalion's attack was vigorous, but it ran head-on into fierce German opposition, and the hard fighting went on all night.

The 338th Infantry, as well as the 339th, fought back-breaking battles against determined resistance during the period 13 to 16 October. After the capture of Formiche, the 3d Battalion, 338th, struck out north of Formiche toward Mount della Vigna, west of the Idice. The 3d Battalion had taken over the sector of the 2d Battalion and during that day it carried the main effort. The 1st Battalion advanced due east from Formiche toward La Torre, east of the river. The 2d Battalion, meanwhile, remained in defensive positions in the vicinity of Formiche. The 1st Battalion seized two hills in its drive toward La Torre, but the 3d Battalion, whose attack was supported by tanks, ran into very heavy fighting, with heavy small-arms fire converging on it from three sides. The men of the 3d Battalion reached Hill 475 once but were forced back. They then swung to the northeast, attacking under the protection of a smoke screen which had been laid down because of the lack of cover and concealment along this route. They cleared Hill 451 northeast of 475 and then renewed their attack on the latter hill. This time they were successful. They captured it and held it securelv.

At this point in the gruelling, prolonged Northern Apennines Campaign, the U.S. 34th Division, which had been fighting some distance west of the 85th, began movement into the line between the 85th and 91st Divisions. On 15 October, the 2d Battalion of the 338th, relieved by elements of the 34th Division, moved through the 3d Battalion of the 338th, and resumed the attack at dawn. The 1st Battalion took La Torre and several other hills, while the 3d Battalion was relieved by other elements of the 34th. The regimental sector west of Highway 6531 now passed to control of the commanding general, 34th Division. The relieved elements of the 85th moved to assembly areas near

Fiumetto and Savazza, where they prepared to continue the attack to the north. The 1st Battalion continued to consolidate positions east of Highway 6531.

In the past week, the enemy had increased the effectiveness of his fierce resistance, but Fifth Army, although often outnumbered and continuously hampered by the terrain and the weather, pressed the Germans back slowly and steadily toward the Po Valley. Field Order No. 23, of 85th Division, issued at this time, stated in part: "It is believed that the enemy's stubborn delaying tactics will be continued as he withdraws slowly to the north and that he may attempt a determined defense of Bologna." With the 34th now in position alongside the 85th, a II Corps attack was planned for the morning of 16 October, with the main effort in the zone of the 85th.

On the 16th, the 339th, which had fought all night on 15-16 October, found the enemy still offering stubborn opposition. However, the 1st Battalion by-passed Roco Britti before dawn and captured Hill 622 (Santa Anna). There it immediately organized positions on the heights while the 2d Battalion still carried on its fight for Hills 536 and 528. Isolated points of resistance had to be tackled one at a time, but by nightfall most of them had been cleared. Hill 518, however, was still held by the enemy. The 3d Battalion moved up to Hill 622, held by the 1st Battalion, and then struck off to the northeast to seize Hill 602.

Darkness set in again, but the 339th's attack on Hill 518 was intensified rather than moderated. By 0230 hours, 17 October, the 2d Battalion had taken the hill. Positions were quickly consolidated. The 2d Battalion went into regimental reserve; the 1st Battalion took over the left zone and the 3d Battalion the right. Company I, 338th Infantry, was now attached to the 339th and occupied defensive positions on the left flank.

The 339th was now heading toward Castelvecchio. The 1st Battalion moved north through Santa Anna. The 3d Battalion took Hill 571. Hill 590 fell on 18 October after repeated assaults by the 1st and 2d Battalions together with elements of the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry.

The 338th, meanwhile, moved toward Mount Fano over rough country. The terrain along this route of advance was very barren and rugged. There was almost nothing behind or under which advancing troops could conceal themselves as they moved toward the hilltops or groups of houses on commanding ground. In this assault, the Custermen had to cross deep ravines over treacherous footing, as the offensive moved from one hill to the next.

It was now 18 October, and the enemy had again intensified his resistance, but the Custermen continued to attack. After elements of the 2d Battalion, 338th, in coordination with the 339th Infantry, had taken Hill 590, the battalion advanced to take two other high points. The 3d Battalion, 338th, maintained holding positions in Baccanello.

On 18 October, also, the 339th Infantry received orders to aid the 88th Division on its right in the latter's advance on Mount Grande. This dominating height lay about three kilometers northeast of Castelvecchio and about the same distance to the northeast of the present position of the advance elements of the 339th. A little over four miles to the northeast of Mount Grande lay Fifth Army's *El Dorado,* the Po Valley. The general plan was for the 339th to employ a substantial force in the retention of Colle Castelvecchio. Then the regiment would advance and seize two high points west of Grande, Hill 425 and Hill 386. In addition, the 339th was assigned the job of protecting the left and rear of the 88th Division as far east as Mount Cuccoli.

On the night of 18-19 October, the 88th Division, too, was poised for the attack. When the attack was launched on the 19th, the 339th, in order to carry out the orders to assist the 88th Division, swung the direction of its attack sharply east. When the assault began, Germans were dug in along the ridge extending east from Castelvecchio and from these positions they were holding up the advance of the 3d Battalion, 350th Infantry (88th Division). The 350th was attacking toward Mount Cuccoli, which was southwest of Mount Grande, yet part of the Grande hill mass. To the right of the 350th, the 349th Infantry was attacking toward the peak of Mount Grande and toward Mount Cerrere, a thousand yards southeast of Grande. The 3d Battalion, 339th, attacked fiercely and by evening had driven the enemy from the Castelvecchio ridge positions, relieving the pressure on the 350th. Liaison had been established between the two regimental headquarters and contact was now made on the ground between the 3d Battalion of the 339th and the 3d Battalion of the 350th. These two units now made preparations to advance in conjunction with one another, in order that the 339th might protect the left flank and rear of the 350th. The Germans were very sensitive about the new offensive in the Mount Grande area and stepped up their artillery fire. Battalion, regimental and division CP areas of both divisions were hard hit with heavy volumes of enemy shells, as the Germans sought to harass supply lines and command installations. The 88th Division's CP got a daily dose for a week but suffered no casualties. The 350th's CP was pummelled for more than three days with high-explosive and delayed-action shells and among the casualties were personnel and equipment of the 85th Division liaison

mission attached to it. This mission was composed of men from the 339th Infantry, and drivers and radio operators from the 85th Signal Company. Direct hits destroyed a jeep and an armored radio car, and all weapons and equipment of the mission in addition to seriously wounding two drivers. The drivers, vehicles and equipment were replaced within twenty hours, chiefly because of the prompt action of Capt. James Herndon, now of 85th Division Headquarters. The two wounded men, however, will walk on artificial feet as long as they live.

Shortly afterward, amid the still-smoking remains of the jeep and radio car, General Clark, in a brief informal ceremony, pinned the Distinguished Service Cross on Col. James C. Fry, commander of the 350th Infantry. Fry later became a brigadier general and assistant division commander of the 88th, and still later, its CG. In a short, impromptu address after the presentation of the award, General Clark said to Fry: "It is you and men like you, officers and enlisted men, who keep the Fifth Army going. I am grateful to you." This is a history of the 85th Division, but it is well to point out that, although the 85th bowed to no division in any army in fighting ability, there were other brave men and units, not only of the United States, but of other countries, that fought the good fight. The Custer Division fought brilliantly from Minturno to the Austrian border, but it never failed to respect and be grateful to the fighting men, of whatever nation, who fought on its flanks.

During this period, the 2d Battalion, 339th, had driven up through Hill 571 and Castelvecchio, moving toward Colle del Vento. The approaches to this hill were well covered by enemy machine guns firing from stone houses on neighboring hills; and the hill itself was well defended by machine guns similarly protected and concealed. Repeated attacks during daylight on the 19th and after dark were unsuccessful in dislodging the enemy; so, on the following day, the 2d Battalion forced its way past the Germans on this hill and occupied positions to the northeast of it. Just to the east of these positions, on 20 October, the 2d Battalion, 337th Infantry, relieved the 3d Battalion, 350th Infantry, on Mount Cuccoli.

The 338th, in the meantime, had made good progress in its advance on Mount Fano. The fight for Fano turned out to be a tough one. The 2d Battalion by-passed Hill 571 to the east and prepared to attack Fano from the southeast. At the same time, Company F was poised to strike at Fano from the southwest. The attack on this important hill began on the late afternoon of the 19th. Although the German resistance was very stiff, the Custermen succeeded in getting as far as the southern slopes of the mountain and in holding their gains against a hail of

enemy fire. Enemy counterattacks came with great force during the night from the northeast and northwest, but they were violently repulsed by the Custermen. The battalion then gathered its strength for a final surge which carried it to the summit of Mount Fano. Another hilltop taken—more Germans killed—another step nearer the Po Valley—another step nearer the heart of the German European stronghold—another day nearer victory.

On 21 October, a heavy fog rolled in, further hampering the advance of the 85th. In the evening, the 2d Battalion, 339th, resumed its offensive against Hill 532, east of Casetta di Vignale. In order to determine the battalion's exact positions, white phosphorus shells were used as reference points, but even these were of little avail. Heavy fighting took place in this vicinity as newly arrived reinforcements, the 190th Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, attached to the Lehr Brigade, offered severe resistance to the 339th's advance on Colle Rio d'Aiano.

During one of the enemy's many strong counterattacks in this area, Sgt. William C. Wall, of Summerfield, North Carolina, provided a hair-raising, yet amusing incident. Wall, at that time a private first class, was an automatic rifleman in Company A, 339th Infantry. He had helped to repel two counterattacks against his squad's position in an engagement in which he personally killed three and wounded five of the attackers. When the Germans had been turned back, Wall volunteered to lead an attack upon the enemy positions nearby. He moved forward swiftly for a short distance along a route which offered comparatively good cover. Then gathering all his strength, he dashed across seventy-five yards of exposed terrain, under observation by the enemy, to a ditch on the far side which, unknown to him, was occupied by five Germans. It is a moot question who was the more surprised. There was no doubt, however, about who reacted more swiftly. Wall covered the Germans before they could make a move, and forced them to surrender to him at once. Eight more Germans, in an adjacent position, bewildered by his sudden appearance, believed themselves to be surrounded and they, too, surrendered to Wall. The whole episode earned him the Silver Star.

Orders were now issued, on 22 October, to guide the 85th in coordinating its attack with that of the 88th Division on the right. On the night of 22-23 October, an attack was to be made to capture Hill 459. When this objective had been taken, the plan was for the 85th to swing northeast to take Mount Mezzano in coordination with the capture of Hill 568 by the 88th.

More enemy reinforcements had arrived in this area. This time,

elements of the 25th Jäger Regiment (42d Light Infantry Division) entered the line to bolster the German defenses.

About the only replacements the entire Fifth Army had received for many weeks now was a contingent of about six thousand troops hurriedly flown to Italy from Cherbourg, France. These men were mostly artillery replacements who were waiting in Cherbourg for assignment to the armies in ETO. With hardly any warning they were ordered aboard planes and shipped to Italy as infantry replacements. At first the men were furious at the deal they got. It was bad enough to be sent to the tough, mountainous Italian Campaign, but to be transferred from artillery to infantry—that was too much. General Coulter ordered three days of orientation discussions for the men who were assigned to the 85th, so that they might know the history and the brilliant battle record of the Custer Division, and also become acquainted with the aims and purposes of the Italian Campaign. The discussions also were to attempt to point out the necessity for the assignment at this time of non-infantry troops to infantry units. Here, indeed, was a striking illustration of the difference between the armies of the democracies and those of the totalitarian governments they were fighting. The latter simply ordered their cooks, bakers, artillerymen, and so on, into infantry units when the occasion arose, without explanation or apology. The U.S. Army sought to give its troops the "why" of such extreme action, on the theory that a better-informed soldier is a better fighting man. The replacements assigned to the 85th went on to join the regiments of the Division and, on the whole, performed exceptionally well.

By nightfall of the 22d, the 339th had secured Colle d'Aiano after severe fighting during which the town changed hands twice. The village was retaken from the Germans by the 1st Battalion after it had passed through the 2d. Elements of the 1st Battalion then pushed on along a ridge toward Hill 459, but they were counterattacked and overrun the following morning by very strong German units which held the reverse slopes of that hill in force. The enemy was held only by the timely employment of Custer reinforcements.

From 22 to 24 October, the 337th fought for enemy positions located at Colle Rovine, Mezzano, and Il Poggio. By 0600 on 25 October, these positions had been captured. Counterattacks were driven off and the regiment prepared to continue the advance. Orders from the army commander, however, were suddenly and unexpectedly received to defend the positions now held, so the 337th set about straightening its lines.

From 22 October to 25 October the 338th Infantry also had to slug its way forward against stubborn opposition. The advance north of

Mount Fano was slow and painful. On 24 October, one of the "bearded angels" won the Silver Star. He was Howard R. Eddy, of Newark, Ohio, a technician fifth grade in the Medical Detachment, 338th Infantry. Eddy, who was killed in a later engagement, learned that several men had been wounded by enemy mines and were lying in the minefield exposed to a heavy mortar barrage. He volunteered at once to assist them. In spite of the fact that the aid man who had been assigned to the platoon which was caught in the minefield had himself been killed by a mine as he advanced to give aid, Eddy went forward. He moved eight hundred yards over ground under hostile fire in an attempt to rescue them. He picked his way through the minefield and finally reached the wounded men. Then he administered first aid and supervised their evacuation, a courageous deed which, at the risk of his own life, unquestionably saved the lives of his comrades.

The Germans were now firing especially heavy artillery concentrations against the 85th's forward positions. The Division Artillery commander, Brigadier General Mallett, ordered more frequent counter-battery missions. However, there was a critical shortage of artillery and mortar ammunition, and it became necessary to allocate available stores for small-scale harassing and defensive fires.

Finally, on 26 October, in accordance with orders from the army commander the Division was committed to the defense of the positions it then held.

The forward advance toward the Po Valley had been halted by army order. For the past week, the enemy, by increasing his reinforcements and artillery fire, had been effectively slowing down the drive. II Corps and the 85th Division at this time did not have sufficient supplies of ammunition or enough infantry replacements to permit a continuance of the advance with maximum effort. The attacking troops, moreover, had gone well beyond the normal limits of human endurance. For six weeks, day after day, week after week, they had attacked and attacked and attacked. Mud, fog, rugged, mountainous terrain, miserable cold, driving rain—all these had contributed to the fatigue of the troops who, although prepared to continue the offensive, were grateful for a respite.

At this point, Colonel Brady, commander of the 339th Infantry Regiment, was granted permission for rotation to the United States. He had been overseas for two years and in that time had acted as instructor and adviser for the 85th Division during its amphibious training in Africa and had led the 339th in Italy in its two brilliant campaigns to date—Rome–Arno and North Apennines. He had led a fighting regi-

ment through the blood and death of the Gustav, Hitler and Gothic Lines.

In his place came a capable and well liked officer, General Coulter's Chief of Staff, Col. William T. Fitts. In addition to being a fearless and tireless leader, Colonel Fitts combined a quiet sternness with a twinkling good humor that promptly endeared him to all officers and men of the regiment. They knew a good commander when they saw one.

A period of defense began. Mines were laid, trip flares set up, and barbed-wire entanglements and bunkers constructed. Patrols were sent out and outpost positions were established. Plans for antitank defense were quickly drawn, and the Division Artillery commander coordinated plans involving the use of demolitions and mines and coordinated Division Artillery with the tank and tank destroyer elements. The roads in the area were now almost impassable, even for mules. Some of the mules broke their legs in frantic efforts to pull themselves out of the deep, sticky mud, and had to be destroyed. The October rains had washed out roads and bridges, which kept the engineers busy day and night. Bailey bridges by the dozens were erected, but in spite of the magnificent work done by the 310th Engineers and supporting engineer units, the service companies had a prodigious task getting ammunition, supplies, and food up forward.

Since 13 September, the 85th Division had fought a brilliant battle against staggering odds. Many men, racked with fever, had continued the fight until they could no longer stand on their feet. Others performed astounding deeds of bravery which, in themselves, turned the tide of many a bitterly fought hilltop struggle. From 13 September 1944, when the Custer Division assaulted the Gothic Line, until 26 October 1944, when the great offensive halted within striking distance of the rich Po Valley, the 85th Division fought one of the most determined and courageous battles in the annals of military history. General Coulter's troops suffered casualties of all types to the extent of 168 officers and 4,899 enlisted men. Twenty-eight officers and 623 enlisted men were killed in action; 96 officers and 2,656 enlisted men wounded; 4 officers and 521 enlisted men were reported missing in action; and 40 officers and 1,099 enlisted men were non-battle casualties.

The weary survivors were ready for rest. On 30 October, orders were issued to govern the conduct of a program of reorganization and rehabilitation. The troops were to get as much relaxation and recreation as the situation would allow. From 31 October to 19 November, the regiments, by a system of rotation and relief of front-line units, were to grant a six-day rest period to each battalion. The stabilization of the

line did not mean that the war was over. It was merely a pause in offensive operations and preparations were made at once for an early resumption of the attack. Equipment was repaired and replaced. Training was conducted for elements relieved from defensive positions. Lessons learned in combat were reviewed and exchanged. Training was conducted in the laying and removal of minefields and in tactics of small units. Special, intensive training programs were conducted for the replacements. The final, great Po Valley offensive was yet to come.

Part VII: *The Winter Line*

RESPITE AFTER THE FATIGUE of battle is, perhaps, the most satisfying rest that man can know. The Custermen, upon their relief from the front lines at the conclusion of the Northern Apennines offensive, were doubly fortunate. Not only were they given opportunity to relax, but they were sent to the world-famous rest resort of Montecatini, northwest of Florence, midway between Lucca and Pistoia. For periods of from four to eight days, units of the 85th Infantry Division enjoyed the town's hotels, theaters, restaurants, and sulphur baths. Montecatini possessed some of the most sumptuous hot baths in the world and, in the past, had been frequented by the rich, seeking the soothing comfort of its health-giving waters. Montecatini could accommodate about twenty thousand persons at one time, and in 1933 had played host to over sixty thousand tourists. It is believed that the very early Romans knew of the benefits of the waters. Visitors definitely enjoyed them from the seventh century on, for at that time Grand Duke Leopold I reconstructed the then existing modest building which housed the baths.

After their long, gruelling offensive across the mountains, the men of the 85th had come down out of the Apennines with long beards, aching feet, tired backs, and bloodshot eyes. They were wet, cold, miserable, and covered with mud from head to foot, but they were proud of what they had accomplished. The Northern Apennines offensive had severely damaged the enemy, smashed his vaunted Gothic Line, on which he had fully expected to make a successful stand, and forced him to bring reinforcements into Italy. These reinforcements, plus the many German divisions already in Italy, were unavailable later to help swell the fury of Von Rundstedt's Ardennes offensive. Neither were these forces available early in January 1945 to aid in stemming the great Russian tide from the east.

Now with November 1944 drawing to a close, and with good hot food under their belts, the Custermen reluctantly left the rest area and returned to training areas in Gagliano, about twenty-five miles north of Florence and a few miles southwest of the original Gothic Line positions pierced by the 85th in September. Training centered on coordination of artillery and infantry and on a comprehensive program of establishing methods of reporting and charting enemy mortar action and of countering and neutralizing this fire.

This training had hardly begun, however, when the Division received instructions to begin preparations for a return to the front line, in the

Monterumici area west of Highway 65, due west of Monterenzio which lay east of the highway. These plans did not materialize, but elements of the Division were sent to that general area on various missions. The 2d Battalion and Cannon Company of the 338th Infantry were attached to the 1st Armored Division on 3 December and 9 December, respectively. They took up defensive positions on the left flank of the 1st Armored. The 2d Battalion, 338th, remained attached to the 1st Armored until 19 December, when it was relieved by the 3d Battalion of that regiment. On 3 December the 329th Field Artillery Battalion was attached to the 1st Armored Division, and on 7 December the 403d Field Artillery Battalion was attached to II Corps, taking up firing positions in the vicinity of Barbarola, just east of Highway 65, southeast of Monterumici. The rest of the Division continued training in the Gagliano area.

Gagliano was a small town serviced by dirt roads which had now turned to slippery, sticky mud. Its two- and three-story, dirty-white stone houses were joined together, as in most Italian towns and cities, so that as one walked along its narrow, winding streets, he seemed to be moving between two great stone walls with windows. On the second floor of one of the buildings were three poorly equipped classrooms which constituted the local school. There was a sizable church and a fairly large public hall with wooden benches which served the 85th Division as a theater. Just outside of the main part of the town and a little way up the hillside were several large individual houses. They could not be called villas, but they were luxurious compared with the living accommodations afforded in town. Several of the houses had large stone barns which troops found suitable for a temporary residence. At least they were better than a pup tent or a pyramidal tent. Housing was inadequate, of course, and many of the men found themselves setting up in pyramidal tents. There wasn't much to Gagliano, but somehow, like many other places where the Division stopped for more than a week, it seemed like home. No doubt the contrast with the unbearable conditions endured during combat made Gagliano more pleasant than it would otherwise have appeared. While stationed here, at least a man could say to himself: "I go out during the day to work and train but in the evening I come 'home'; I have a good hot meal and if I wish I can sit around a fire and talk to my friends, or I can go to a movie."

Here in Gagliano it was possible to forget some of the horrors of the last eight months of combat and to speculate on an early end of the war. It did seem that the Germans were hard pressed. The Allied

armies in Italy had backed them up almost into the Po Valley in the northern section of Italy. On the Western Front, the U.S. First Army was in Germany, only a half mile from Düren, key city to the defenses of Cologne. The Third Army had just entered Germany northeast of Saar-Union, while the Seventh Army was a mere one and a half miles from the German border, at a point sixteen miles west of Karlsruhe. On Monday, 11 December 1944, Germany had been pounded by what the Associated Press called the greatest fleet of four-engined aircraft ever assembled. It was the biggest air attack of the war. Ten thousand tons of bombs were dropped on Germany. The attack involved 3,500 planes which came from bases in England and Italy. The U.S. Eighth Air Force, based in Britain, sent over 1,600 heavy bombers, escorted by 800 fighters, which dropped 6,000 tons on the Western Germany rail centers of Frankfurt, Hanau, and Giessen. The Fifteenth Air Force, based in Italy, hit targets near Vienna with 1,100 planes. In the east, the Russians, under Marshal Malinovsky, had broken through German defenses north of Budapest and were about eighty-five miles from the Austrian border in their drive toward Bratislava and Vienna. South of the Hungarian capital, Russian forces were lined up only forty miles from Austria.

At this satisfactory stage of the war against Germany, however, dreams of its early conclusion were sharply shattered by the sudden, powerful German counteroffensive on the Western Front. The location of the attack, which came on 16 December 1944, between the weight of the U.S. First and Ninth Armies' drive toward the Ruhr Valley, and the Third Army's advance on the Saar Basin, suggested that Von Rundstedt was making a desperate gamble to relieve pressure on both these vital sectors in one swift, powerful blow. Without doubt, he also hoped to upset whatever plans General Eisenhower had for a general winter offensive, supplied through the great port of Antwerp. The success of this desperate gamble to upset the Western Front would have enabled the German high command to turn its attention to the growing threat of renewed Allied action in Italy and on the Eastern Front, where winter offensives also appeared imminent. Furthermore, German reserves would be needed soon in Austria where Vienna, the gateway to Southeastern Germany, was gravely threatened by the Russians.

The pros and cons of the question of Allied preparedness for the Battle of the Bulge will probably be debated for generations. There can be no question, however, about the preparedness of the 15th Army Group in Italy. For some time, intelligence officers of Maj.Gen. Willis D. Crittenberger's IV Corps had been observing signs of a concentration of German forces opposite the U.S. 92d Division in the Serchio Valley,

north of Lucca. After a detailed study of all available information, particularly of aerial photographs which indicated an increase of wheel tracks leading to assembly areas and which showed widespread improvement of main and secondary roads in the area, the officers estimated that some six enemy divisions were massing against the 92d Division for a blow whose ultimate objective was undoubtedly the recapture of the port of Leghorn, now the main supply base for both Fifth and Eighth Armies.

General Clark, new commander of the Allied Armies in Italy, and Lieutenant General Truscott, new commander of Fifth Army, acted swiftly. The Indian 8th Division was pulled out of Eighth Army and ordered to move west at once to the vicinity of Lucca. General Truscott ordered the 85th Division and the 1st Armored Division into action with instructions to move at once to the Lucca area. Once in that sector, these divisions were to be attached to IV Corps.

General Coulter promptly sent liaison representatives to IV Corps headquarters, then located well up in the mountains north of Pistoia. Now began one of the fastest and most efficient movement of troops and vehicles witnessed in the Italian Campaign. The stretch of road between Pistoia and Lucca resembled nothing so much as the home stretch of a racetrack with the horses pounding at a furious pace down to the finish line. For, in fact, it was a race—a race against time. The enemy was due to strike at any moment and Allied counterattack forces must be on hand to strike back. The divisions involved in the move were all battle-seasoned units which now responded to the urgency of the moment.

The 337th Infantry moved to the Lucca area on 23 December. Early in the morning of 24 December, the 339th began to move west. By 1230 hours the same day, Colonel Fitts' Polar Bears had closed in at an assembly area west of Prato, a few miles southeast of Pistoia. Prato was a sizable town not only famous for its woolen mills but also rich in its works of art. Chief among these was the Cathedral of Prato, built in the second century. The rear of the Cathedral was remodeled in the third century, and its facade was renovated with alternating strips of white and green marble from Prato early in the fourth century. Mounted outside on one corner of the structure about twenty feet from the ground is the renowned circular marble pulpit and canopy of Donatello and Michelozzo, constructed for the public exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Indian 8th Division was now well on its way west to meet the challenge of the expected German attack.

At 0600 hours on Christmas morning, General Crittenberger suddenly ordered his entire IV Corps headquarters to move immediately to Lucca. Signs that a German attack was imminent had multiplied, and corps headquarters had to be in position to direct operations to repulse it. Written instructions may have been issued covering the move, but it is doubtful if anyone saw them. The danger was great, and speed was of the essence. Swift, crisp oral orders were issued throughout IV Corps headquarters. Officers in charge of the various sections composing IV Corps headquarters were ordered: "Move at once. No specific order of march. When your sections are ready get on the road and go." This was a radical departure from the usual method of moving troops on the roads. Normally each unit had a definite place in the convoy and a definite time of departure. Now, however, throughout the CP area the cry went up: "Let's go! Hit the road!" One would have expected confusion supreme to follow, but military police, convoy commanders, and drivers did a remarkable and magnificent job of impromptu coordination. By 0730 hours, the first unit was on the road and moving fast.

It was Christmas Day and a delightful, large-flaked snowfall was gently and peacefully covering the Apennines. It was cold. Along the road near one of the chow lines stood small groups of Italian children waiting patiently with their ubiquitous tin buckets for scraps of food. They were pathetic figures—some in fragile, tattered excuses for foot covering, many barefoot—all without coats or hats.

By nightfall, IV Corps was set up in Lucca. Close on its heels came officers from the 85th Division, representing General Coulter, seeking the most suitable water points, supply points, and assembly areas for the Custer Division. At 2100 hours the rest of the 85th began to move to the vicinity of Lucca. General Coulter had now arrived at IV Corps headquarters and was conferring with General Crittenberger on the employment of the Custer Division.

Early in the morning of 26 December the Germans attacked. The force of their blow carried them through the forward positions of the 92d Division in several places. At other points, companies of the 92d held their ground and delayed the advance. By now, however, the Indian 8th Division was in line beside the 92d and tanks of the 1st Armored Division were backing up the defense. The 85th Division was placed in IV Corps reserve and was prepared for employment as a counterattacking force in the sectors of either the Indian 8th Division or of the 92d Division.

From the coast at Viareggio a chain of mountains, some more than five thousand feet high, extended to the east. The plain along the coast and the Serchio Valley, cutting the mountains north of Lucca, were the most likely routes of enemy advance. The 337th and 338th Infantry Regiments were initially held available for counterattack forces. In a forward CP in a large stone building, General Coulter quickly and expertly discussed with Colonel Hughes and Colonel Mikkelsen plans for the use of their regiments. When the conference was over, it had been decided that the 337th would make continual reconnaissance of the general line of defense which included the sector of the Indian 8th Division and part of the sector of the 92d Division. The 338th was to conduct similar reconnaissance in the area west of this sector and be prepared for commitment in coordination with the 92d Division. The 85th Reconnaissance Troop was ordered to be prepared to protect the flanks of whatever defensive positions might be occupied and to conduct reconnaissance in coordination with the two regiments. Guards were placed over several bridges and elements of the 85th Recon Troop patrolled important roads in the Division area.

Not all of the 85th had arrived in the Lucca area. Now, however, units that had been attached to other units moved to the scene of the German offensive. On 27 December, the 329th Field Artillery Battalion and the 403d Field Artillery Battalion were detached from II Corps and returned to the control of the 85th Division.

The 339th RCT, which had been held in the Prato area, was suddenly ordered to join Task Force 45 in the IV Corps front line up in the mountains north of Prato near San Marcello and Limestre. Upon arrival and attachment to the task force at 0600 hours, 27 December, the 339th became the chief infantry element of that force. Lt.Col. Isaacson's 910th Field Artillery Battalion and Capt. Rufus Hallmark's Cannon Company of the 339th went into firing positions. The infantrymen set about digging and camouflaging several defense positions in the snow-covered hills, to be occupied in case of attack in this area. No attack developed in this sector and the Polar Bears and their supporting troops for once found life fairly pleasant amid the beautiful scenery of the white-mantled mountains and in the villas and winter resort homes formerly enjoyed by well-to-do Italians and wealthy land owners and tourists from other countries.

On 27 December, the 329th Field Artillery Battalion was detached from the 85th Division and moved to Cerreto, where it was placed under the operational control of the Indian 8th Division. At the same time, the 328th Field Artillery Battalion and the 403d Field Artillery

Battalion were detached from the Division and attached to the 92d Infantry Division, moving, respectively, to positions near Montone and Mommio.

The enemy's initial attack had petered out. Whether it had been designed merely as a reconnaissance in force or whether it was called off when the Allied strength in the area was discovered, only the German commander could say. However, a renewal of the attack was expected momentarily. At 0700, 30 December, the combat elements of the Division (minus the 339th RCT) were placed on a two-hour alert to repel counterattacks in the sectors of either the 92d or the Indian 8th Divisions. But the enemy did not attack.

During the first week of January 1945 the 85th continued preparation for commitment to the line in the IV Corps sector. On 6 January, however, General Coulter received orders to move the Custer Division immediately to the vicinity of Gagliano preparatory to relieving the British 1st Division in the Mount Grande area, north and west of the Torrente Sillaro. The movement to Gagliano began on 7 January, and by 11 January all the units of the Division had closed in that area and had reverted to Division control.

Just before leaving Limestre, Col. William T. Fitts, CO of the 339th Infantry, had returned to Division headquarters to resume his job as Chief of Staff. Command of this fighting regiment now fell on the shoulders of Lt.Col. John T. English, who for many months had been its executive officer. English, still in his early thirties, was a graduate of the Military Academy and was an exceptionally able leader. His selection as CO of the 339th Infantry was enthusiastically approved by his troops. Lt.Col. English had long since won the respect of his men by such acts as appearing in person at 0300 in the morning to check the security and alertness of regimental front-line outpost positions.

On 8 January elements of the 85th began moving out of Gagliano northward to begin the relief of the British 1st Division. For many days following, the gradual relief of that division was effected, and on 17 January General Coulter assumed control of the sector. The Custer Division was again on the front-line, and for fifty-six days it was destined to hold down a vital sector of the Northern Apennines Winter Line.

The 85th had now taken up positions in the vicinity of Farneto, Mount Cuccoli, Marzolina, Frassineto, Mount Cerere and Mount Grande. The central feature in the line now held was Mount Grande, two thou-

sand feet high, and the ridge to the north connecting with Montecalderaro which formed the northern extension of Mount Grande. This long arm, which extended well into enemy territory, was exposed on both flanks. To the southeast, the front line extended from Grande along the Cerere ridge a short distance beyond the village of Frassineto. The west half of the Division front extended from Grande along the slopes of the Cuccoli ridge a short distance west of Marzolina. From southeast to west the Division line was about three and a half kilometers long, but the perimeter of defenses, including Montecalderaro, measured about five kilometers. On the right, the Division's sector cut sharply northeast and the forward positions of the adjacent division were due south of Frassineto. As a result, the Division front faced enemy positions to the east and southeast as well as those to the north and northeast. A close watch on enemy activity on the right flank of the Division was therefore necessary. Opposing the Custermen at this time was the German 1st Parachute Division.

Snow, less than a foot deep in open country but waist-deep in the ravines, covered most of the 85th's sector during January. Additional snowfalls were spaced by rain and hail. On several occasions the temperature rose quickly and thaws set in for brief periods. Fog- and ice-covered roads hampered vehicular and mule traffic.

The men of the 85th were in reinforced dug-in positions which they continuously improved. The few buildings in the forward areas were also occupied. For the first time in the campaign, the Custermen had the edge on the enemy in elevation. From the high ground held by the 85th, bare slopes and deep ravines led to the somewhat less high hills held by the enemy. It was the same worn, rocky, barren country which had become so familiar to the Custermen during the great mountain battles that raged in October and November. The rain and snow and frequent thaws had the engineers busy spreading great quantities of gravel to provide a firm base for traffic. Mule trails were constructed and laid with matting. When the mule trails gave out, foot trails continued on to the extreme forward positions.

Although the forward positions held by the 85th dominated the enemy, from certain high features the Germans had observation over much of the Division's sector. Daylight movement was consequently greatly restricted. An example of the precautions that had to be taken to camouflage activity was the wearing of white capes by the mules in order that their movements in the snow might be concealed.

The 85th had to be constantly on the alert during this period for possible enemy attacks, for the possession of the Montecalderaro–Grande–Cerere feature which the Division occupied would have greatly

strengthened the enemy's defense line. The Germans could be expected to make a serious effort at any time to regain these positions. They had recaptured from the British some of the high ground formerly held by the Americans, and another attack to retake more of the commanding ground was considered likely. To prevent such an effort from succeeding, the Custermen blocked all avenues of approach to their positions with ambush patrols. They manned all positions in strength after dark, during fogs and in periods of poor visibility. The outpost line was manned during daylight.

Conversely, because of Allied pressure on Germany from the east and the west, there was the constant possibility that the Germans in Italy would have to withdraw along the entire front, in order to avoid isolation and in order to lend assistance to the defense of their homeland. The 1st Parachute Division, now opposing the 85th, was acknowledged to be the best of the German divisions in Italy. The actions of this division would be extremely important in the event of withdrawal. Patrols of the 85th Division were constantly going out to check on the strength and location of enemy positions in order that the Division might be informed as soon as there were any signs that the enemy was about to withdraw. These patrols also sought to identify enemy units and to take prisoners.

The troops of both sides wore white clothing to conceal their movements in the snow. Sound caused more detection of patrols than sight. The sound of a patrol member's foot breaking through the crust of the snow was always the signal for a hail of enemy machine-gun and rifle fire.

During this period, companies and battalions relieved one another periodically on position so that the troops could get as much rest from front-line action as possible. The period was what could be generally termed a quiet one; yet, during it, ten enlisted men were killed in action, an officer and sixty-two enlisted men were wounded, and two enlisted men were reported missing in action. It was just as tough to be killed or wounded during a "quiet" period in a stabilized line as it was to get it during the height of a major offensive.

One bright note during the winter and an unmistakable sign of the power of the coming spring offensive was the number of replacements being assigned to the Division. In December, 32 officers and 399 enlisted men became Custermen. During January, 42 officers and 828 enlisted men joined the Division. The replacements were given special training in weapons and tactics and attended frequent orientation conferences during which they discussed world events and argued world problems. After sufficient training these men were rotated with troops

on the line for brief periods in order that they might receive battle experience.

As the month of February 1945 got under way, the weather turned moderately warm, melting the snow from most of the region. The ground gradually dried out and the maintenance of supplies became easier. On 5 February the 85th Division Artillery fired a preparation in support of a limited objective attack by the 34th Division on the left. The Germans didn't like this sign of increased activity. They replied with an increase in artillery fire against the 85th Division's sector for several days, and during the rest of the month the volume of enemy fire was consistently greater than that prior to 5 February. The positions on Montecalderaro received frequent heavy shellings from artillery and mortars. On 20 February the forward command post of the 1st Battalion, 337th Infantry, received several direct hits by 120mm mortar shells. The battalion commander and four others were killed and twelve were wounded.

As the winter wore on and spring began to draw near, the enemy became increasingly active in the improvement of his defense lines. He obviously expected a major spring offensive. It was now March and the weather was sunny and spring-like. The long cold winter was over and with it the miserable suffering in freezing, snow-covered, fog-bound mountain sides. During the winter months the troops had had great difficulty in keeping warm. This region of the Apennines in which the 85th was operating was almost entirely devoid of trees. To a frozen, shivering soldier, a scrap of wood to burn was worth its weight in gold. So scarce was wood in some sections that men of the British 1st Division, which the 85th relieved, had been forced to remove the wooden shutters from nearby stone houses and chop them up for firewood. When the 85th took over the area, there was not even this little fuel left. Many troops, it is true, enjoyed the comfort of gasoline stoves, but as many more did not. Men on front-line positions had to get along without fires. The first faint warm breath of spring was most welcome.

With the coming of the warm weather there came, too, for the Custer Division relief from front-line action. On 9 March orders were issued governing the relief of the Division in the next few days by the Indian 10th Division, at that time holding positions on the right of the Division sector. On 13 March, the control of the 85th Division's sector, which the Custermen had defended for fifty-six days, passed to the general officer commanding the Indian 10th Division.

Upon relief from the line, the units of the 85th moved to the Gagliano area where training was resumed, or to the Montecatini rest area. Provision was made for all troops to spend four days at Montecatini, for a period of complete rest and recreation. The training program, continued after the rest period, laid great emphasis on the renewal of offensive combat. On 18 March, the 85th Division became Fifth Army reserve.

While in the Gagliano training area, orders were received to send the 85th Division Artillery to relieve the 91st Division Artillery which was then supporting the 34th Infantry Division. On 20 March, the 329th Field Artillery Battalion went into position near Roncobertolo, west of Highway 65 and west of the Torrente Savena. The 910th Field Artillery Battalion went into firing positions on 21 March at a point near Barbarola. On 22 March, the 403d Field Artillery Battalion completed the relief of the 348th Field Artillery Battalion (91st Division) east of Highway 65 near Poggiolo.

As the days went by it became increasingly clear that a great spring offensive was in the making in Italy. Large stores of supplies were constantly being moved to supply points about ten miles behind the lines. Replacements continued to report in to the headquarters of the various divisions. As part of the preparation for renewal of the attack by the Allied armies in Italy, the 85th Division received orders on 21 March to move units of the Division west to the vicinity of Cascine Nuovo on the banks of the Arno west of Pisa. Here the troops were to engage in special exercises in the assault crossing of rivers.

Pisa is the Italian city which houses the famous Leaning Tower. For generations past, Italians had had great affection for this tower. They had even written a song about it: *"Viva il Torre di Pisa"* ("Long Live the Tower of Pisa"). Knowing this, the Germans, in their daily English- and Italian-language propaganda broadcasts, repeated that the "brutal and murderous" British and Americans had bombed and shelled and utterly destroyed the great Tower of Pisa in a "most wanton and shameful fashion." The Nazis hoped the effect on the Italians would be the same as the reaction of an American might be if he were told someone had dug up the grave of Abraham Lincoln or desecrated the Statue of Liberty. While in the vicinity of Pisa, Custermen had a chance to see for themselves convincing evidence of the enemy's lies. The Tower of Pisa was still standing, untouched.

The 337th was the first to move to the Cascine Nuovo area. Colonel Hughes' men immediately launched an intensive four-day period of battalion and regimental combat team river-crossing problems. At the conclusion of the exercises, they moved to a bivouac area south of

Lucca near Colle Paladini, where they resumed the regular training program. The 338th then moved into the Cascine Nuovo area and began similar river-crossing exercises on 27 March. The 339th Infantry did not participate in these problems, but it did send officers and non-commissioned officers to watch the other combat teams. By the end of the month, almost all the 339th officers and platoon and section sergeants had witnessed the training.

The 339th was now preparing for a secret move from Gagliano to an area near Lucca. The 85th Recon Troop had already left Gagliano and was bivouacked at Asciano, just northeast of Pisa.

Part VIII: *The Spring Offensive*

BEFORE THE DIVISION left Gagliano, General Coulter called his officers together and informed them that a spring offensive was in the making and that the army commander wanted the 85th Division, his reserve, to drop out of sight—disappear completely. The Custer Division was to have an important, special assignment, and the purpose of the great secrecy was to conceal from the enemy the disposition and probable use of the Division in the coming offensive. Before departure from the Gagliano area, all identifying marks were removed from equipment and vehicles; the Division insignia was removed from the troops' clothing, helmet liners and steel helmets; and new road markings were used to guide the convoys.

Most of the 85th was soon hiding out in the forests and farmlands around Lucca. All three regiments were broken up into company groups and scattered about the countryside so that there would be no impression that there was a large force in the area. The 85th Division Artillery, which had been in support of the 34th Division (relieved during the period by the 88th Division) had now been relieved and in the early part of April moved to the vicinity of Lucca. The 85th Division forward CP was operating in the vicinity of Lugnano. Division rear was at Buti. The 338th Infantry was close to Lucca. The 339th opened its CP at Badia. The 785th Ordnance Company, the 85th Reconnaissance Troop, the 85th Signal Company, the 85th MP Platoon, the 310th Medical Battalion, the 85th Quartermaster Company, and the 310th Engineer Battalion—all had moved in secrecy to the Lucca area and had set up their respective CPs.

The warm April sun that for hundreds of years had caused the Italians to burst into unrestrained song, was now pouring down upon the farms and silver-leafed olive groves, shedding its warmth and beauty over the countryside, and imparting the sweet sense of relaxation and comfort that can only be described as "spring fever." Capt. Bert Adams, adjutant of the 339th Infantry, summed up everyone's mood when, as he stood up on the hillside on the spacious terrace in front of the Arganini Villa, overlooking the flat farmlands stretching off into the golden haze of sunshine that enveloped Pisa, he said, "I could spend the rest of the war right here."

On 14 March 1945, about the time that the 85th was being relieved from the Northern Apennines Winter Line and was returning to Gagliano, Allied Force Headquarters in Caserta received representations from the enemy that the Germans in Italy were interested in surrender dis-

cussions. Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander was cautious but was interested in having the enemy send authorized representatives to Caserta to accept unconditional surrender terms. Two Allied officers, General Lemnitzer and General Airey, were dispatched to Locarno, Switzerland, to meet the German General Karl Wolff, top officer of the SS in Northern Italy, to determine whether the Germans were genuinely interested in ending the war in Italy by surrendering. They met outside of Locarno on 19 March 1945.

Neither General Lemnitzer nor General Airey gave his name. They were introduced to General Wolff and his party as "high-ranking Allied officers." General Lemnitzer did the talking, in English, and his remarks were translated into German. He made clear the general helplessness of the German position in Europe and suggested that something should be done about it, stressing that a great deal of planning was necessary to surrender a large force. The conference did not go into peace terms; there were no negotiations at this time. General Lemnitzer said his only interest at the moment was in getting authorized German representatives to Caserta for detailed parleys if the Germans wanted peace. He pointed out, however, that the Allies were interested only in unconditional surrender and that there would be no point in coming to AFHQ unless they were willing to accept unconditional surrender. Any conference that did develop at Caserta, General Wolff was informed, would be strictly limited to methods of military surrender and would not deal with political or governmental matters.

Wolff told the Allied generals that Marshal Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, had just been recalled to Germany and there was some question as to whether he would return to his command in Italy. This would create a difficult situation, Wolff said, for he did not know how a new commander would react to the possibility of surrender. He said he would try to persuade the new commander. (It was learned later that Marshal Kesselring had been given command of all German forces in the west and his successor in Italy was Col.Gen. Heinrich von Vietinghoff-Scheel, former commander of the German Tenth Army.)

Wolff said he had been motivated by a desire to save his country from further destruction, which he considered inevitable under the constant Allied hammering. He felt that the senseless destruction should no longer continue, since resisting it would not change the outcome of the war.

Another difficulty that bothered Wolff was the problem of keeping news of these conversations from Himmler and Hitler, whose spies were infiltrated throughout the German Army. There was the constant fear, too, that either or both would drop into Italy for an inspection

tour. Wolff said he had seen the two Nazi leaders in February and had told them of the general hopelessness of the German situation, but he had received no definite instructions from them.

Before Wolff returned to his headquarters in Italy, an agreement was reached to hold another meeting in five days, on 24 March. General Wolff explained, however, that travel in Northern Italy was not easy. He had been shot up once by Allied aircraft, and on another occasion his car had overturned during black-out driving.

The two Allied generals returned to Locarno to await the meeting scheduled for 24 March.

During the tense days of waiting that followed, General Lemnitzer and General Airey wondered if they were following a false lead. They waited and waited, wondering whether they should remain or return to Caserta. They did not know for sure whether General Wolff would return or, if he did, whether the German representatives would accept the terms of surrender. The day of the meeting, 24 March, came and went. The 25th, 26th, and 27th passed. Nothing happened. The 28th and 29th came and went. Finally, on 30 March, they received word that General Wolff had returned to his headquarters at Fasano on the shores of Lake Garda.

This information was followed by a message that another meeting would be arranged soon. The Allied generals and their OSS assistants started to ease their way toward the meeting place in the vicinity of Locarno. Word came through that General Wolff would meet them on Easter Sunday, 1 April. Sunday passed, no General Wolff. On 2 April the generals were informed that Wolff would be unable to come. It seemed that Himmler had telephone Wolff and asked him why he had gone to Switzerland. Wolff's explanation had been that he had gone there in connection with negotiations for the exchange of prisoners of war. Himmler ordered him not to go to Switzerland again, and he told Wolff that he planned to call him regularly to assure that he was carrying out these instructions.

A few days later, Wolff reported to the Allied generals that he had discussed the surrender with the new German commander, General von Vietinghoff, and that while matters were going moderately well, he had no definite word of instructions.

At this point the Allied generals informed Wolff that they appreciated the effort he was making and the difficulties he was encountering, but that they saw no reason why they should remain in Switzerland any longer. Should they receive favorable word from General Wolff, they would return at any time. On 4 April they left Switzerland and arrived back in Caserta at 1645 hours the same day.

Five days later the great Allied offensive to crush the Germans in Italy was launched. General Lemnitzer remarked to friends that he thought "the situation would warm up after that."

All these highly secret movements and conversations went on, of course, entirely unknown to the fighting men. The troops of Fifth and Eighth Armies were preparing for what they hoped would be the final offensive in Italy. In the months just passed they had come far over the difficult, long, and tortuous road they had followed. They had knocked Italy out of the war. They had invaded Italy against German opposition. They had steadily and surely fought their way up the Italian boot over some of the toughest fighting country in the world. They had liberated Rome, first of the European capitals to be freed from the yoke of Nazi domination. They had freed Florence, Pescara, Perugia, Siena, Ancona, Volterra, Lucca, Leghorn (Livorno), Rimini, and hundreds of other Italian towns and villages. They had smashed their way across the towering Northern Apennines in a brutal, grinding, courageous offensive that had carried them to the heights overlooking the rich Po Valley.

The fight all over Italy had been a terrific one, and as the troops now looked northward across the Po Valley toward the Alps, they could feel justly proud of their tremendous accomplishments to date. Their contribution to the entire war effort in Europe had been incalculable. As Col. Karl Detzer points out in his book, *The Mightiest Army:* "The Italian Campaign never was a sideshow, as too many people imagine. It was one of the three big rings in the biggest show on earth. For valor and ingenuity and keen strategy it ranked with the best."

The importance of the fighting in Italy and especially of the German defense of Northern Italy had been the subject of Field Marshal Alexander's first official statement after becoming Supreme Allied Commander of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations late in 1944.

"There is no short cut to Germany until we beat the German Army," he said. "A sizable portion of that army is in Italy. In its attempts to offset the Allied drive on the Reich, the German command has been forced to draw some of its finest divisions to the Italian front. To the Germans, this front is important enough to keep a strong and powerful fighting force deployed against the approaches to the Po Valley, where there are more than twenty enemy divisions."

Alexander listed five major reasons for the Germans' decision to hold Italy. They were: (1) The Germans intend to hold the Allies as far from the Reich frontier as possible. (2) The Germans prefer to fight on other peoples' soil, rather than their own. (3) Taking food

from Northern Italy to supply German troops is better for Germany than taking food from the Reich. (4) Genoa, Milan, Turin and other industrial centers of the Po Valley provide the Wehrmacht with ammunition, transport, and many types of war matériel. (5) The loss of all of Italy now could deal a hard blow to German morale and political standing, for the Germans are making use of their pawns—the current Fascist Republican Government—behind the German lines in the north.

A captured enemy document prepared by the German Ambassador to the Fascist Republican Government revealed that besides supplying the entire German Army in Italy with food, the German exploitation of Northern Italy provided Germany itself with textiles, tiles, leather, shoes, rice, wine, fruits, and trucks. The German Ambassador, Herr Von Rahn, drew up the inventory of vital products gained for the Reich by the German exploitation of Northern Italy in a letter to General Lemelson, commander of the German Fourteenth Army, aimed at impressing German soldiers that "untoward acts against Italian civilians out of disdain, hatred, or disappointment" might jeopardize the German harvest. Despite their "understandably violent aversion toward the Italian people," the letter read, German troops "should be as friendly as possible" to the Italians in order that the "rich reward" of continued collaboration with the Mussolini government might continue. German soldiers must modify their harsh attitude, not "out of humane consideration," but so that the flow of goods, which had included 321,000 tons of iron and steel, 3,800 tons of zinc, 9,000 tons of aluminum, 80,000 bottles of mercury, 38,500 tons of sulphur, 14,000 tons of rice, 160,000 tons of fruit, and 200,000 tons of wine shall continue, the Ambassador declared.

Herr Von Rahn's inventory added that in addition to the industrial and food products, the Germans sent back home 1,500,000 pairs of leather military shoes, 400,000 pairs of work shoes, and textiles amounting to nearly one-quarter of Germany's total manufacture in 1943. Trucks, extremely scarce in both liberated and occupied Italy, were exported to Germany at a rate of over a thousand a month at the beginning of 1944. In addition, the government of Mussolini agreed to turn over to Germany all gold stores in Italy, all of Italy's stock of precious radium as well as all Italian materials and semi-manufactured merchandise not urgently needed for Italian industry.

The fact that the Germans continued to keep from twenty to twenty-five divisions in Italy made it obvious that they considered the Italian front vital to the entire struggle, for in early April 1945, the German armies were hard pressed on both the Eastern and the Western Fronts. It was clear that a crushing German defeat in Northern Italy would

inflict a severe and perhaps a fatal blow on the whole German war effort. As events turned out, that is exactly what happened—but that is the story of the great Po Valley offensive and the part played in its stunning success by the Custer Division.

Facing the powerful Fifth Army as it lay poised for what it hoped would be the final campaign, were some of the best troops the Germans had. In numbers, they were about equal to the forces of Fifth and Eighth Armies. These German forces had divisions that were intact, well trained, and rested. They had been filled up with replacements who had had the winter to train and prepare for the German defense of Northern Italy. The enemy's supply depots were well stocked, but his transport suffered a shortage of spare parts. Allied air action had also made German oil supplies short. Oil wells and synthetic oil plants controlled by the enemy had been heavily bombed. As a result, German motor movement in Northern Italy was severely restricted and the German command followed a policy of conserving supplies and ammunition. Moreover, Allied airmen were out swarming over the Po Valley daily in such force that what movement the Germans were inclined to make during daylight hours had to be postponed until darkness fell. So great was Allied air superiority in the Po Valley that after a while the MAAF flyers took to chasing individual, venturesome German cyclists on secondary roads.

Lieutenant Colonel Delbert Clark, General Truscott's public relations officer, former Washington and later Berlin correspondent for *The New York Times,* in his masterly Fifth Army history of the Po Valley Campaign, *19 Days,* aptly describes the situation.

"The magnificent job that had been done by supporting air forces," he wrote, "was all too evident to anyone who ventured to fly out over the Po Valley on a clear day. Northward in the vast pattern of little farms, vineyards, and orchards interlaced by white roads and dotted with towns and villages, hardly a sign of life and but little movement could be seen, even in such large towns as Bologna and Modena.

"However, turning south and passing back over the Allied front the scene changed abruptly to one of great activity. Dust clouds hung over every road; motors, guns, and tanks clustered around every farm and village building. Tiny figures could be seen moving everywhere, piling supplies, training earnestly, playing football or softball; little fear of the once vaunted Luftwaffe here."

But if the Luftwaffe was but a shadow of its former power, the German Army confronting Fifth Army was, in the words of General Truscott, "in better condition than any German Army has ever been in Italy so far as strength is concerned." The Germans were solidly

dug into formidable positions in the remaining mountains that stood between Fifth Army and the Po Valley. They had been working feverishly all winter to strengthen their line and now they faced General Truscott's troops from log-reinforced caves, from deep, barricaded foxholes whose approaches were protected by barbed wire and mines, and from concrete bunkers and pillboxes.

Across no man's land from the Nazis, along a line extending from the Ligurian Sea to positions east of Highway 65 and southeast of Bologna, were the equivalent of more than ten divisions of Fifth Army under General Truscott. On the extreme left flank was the greatly enlarged 92d Division, commanded by Maj.Gen. Edward M. Almond. In addition to this division's own 370th Infantry (the 365th and 371st Infantry Regiments had been detached and assigned to IV Corps) General Almond's command was reinforced by the 473d Infantry, made up of former antiaircraft men, and the 442d Regimental Combat Team, the renowned unit that had fought so long and so well in Italy and Southern France. To the right of the 92d, the line swung northeast along high ground. In this area Maj.Gen. Joao Batista Mascarenhas de Moraes' Brazilian Expeditionary Force was located. On his right was the U.S. 10th Mountain Division, commanded by Maj.Gen. George P. Hays. Continuing east, next to General Hays' special trained mountain troops, was Maj.Gen. Vernon E. Prichard's 1st Armored Division. This completed the IV Corps line-up and anchored General Crittenberger's right flank on the Reno River.

Major General Geoffrey Keyes commanded II Corps. On the extreme left in the II Corps sector was the South African 6th Armoured Division, under Maj.Gen. W. H. E. Poole. Next to it on the right was the 88th Division, under the command of Maj.Gen. Paul W. Kendall. Then came the 91st Division, commanded by Maj.Gen. William G. Livesay, and to the right of it, the 34th Division, commanded by Maj.Gen. Charles L. Bolté. On the right of the 34th and linking Fifth and Eighth Armies was the Italian Legnano Group, composed of about eight thousand Italian troops under Maj.Gen. Umberto Utili. In Fifth Army reserve and prepared to be thrown into the battle at any vital point in this long line was Maj.Gen. John B. Coulter's 85th Division.

The Po Valley offensive by 15th Army Group was to be divided into three main phases: (1) The capture or isolation of Bologna. (2) A breakthrough of the German defenses by either Fifth or Eighth Army and encirclement of the enemy forces south of the Po. (3) The crossing of the Po River and the capture of Verona and the Brenner Pass, main route of escape from Italy for the enemy.

D-day was originally set for 10 April 1945, but it was later changed

to 9 April. The main effort was to be made by Fifth Army but only after Eighth Army had attacked to clear the section of the valley east of Bologna. Fifth Army's plan was called Operation Craftsman and provided that II and IV Corps should attack abreast with the main effort initially astride Highway 64. Apart from deception, the chief purpose of this emphasis on the IV Corps sector was to bring IV Corps up on line with II Corps. During the Northern Apennines Campaign, the main attack had been in the II Corps sector and the force of the blows struck here had punched out a considerable bulge in the Fifth Army line. While IV Corps was engaged in straightening out the line, a secondary effort was to be made along Highway 65. Once IV Corps came abreast of II Corps, however, at a point about fifteen miles north of Vergato, in the 10th Mountain Division's sector of the IV Corps line, the main weight of Fifth Army would be concentrated west of Highway 65 and immediately west of Highway 64.

The day of the great assault was near at hand. For weeks huge convoys had been winding their way up Highways 64 and 65 depositing their loads anywhere from two to ten miles behind the front line. Staggered alongside the highways were great stockpiles of ammunition. Tanks and big guns, including big eight-inch howitzers, labored up the winding mountain roads and rumbled into firing positions behind the forward infantry troops. A rejuvenated, powerful 15th Army Group was ready for renewed major offensive action.

The main Fifth Army effort was preceded by a powerful one-two punch by other 15th Army Group forces. The first blow came on the extreme left of the 15th Army Group line and the second fell at the extreme right flank in the sector of Eighth Army. At dawn on 5 April the 92d Division attacked. The blow was preceded by a heavy artillery barrage in which the 85th Division's 329th Field Artillery Battalion, attached to the 92d Division, participated. The 329th had been assigned the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 599th Field Artillery Battalion, which was providing direct support for the 442d Infantry. The 329th fired preparations for the attack of the 442d on Mount Carchio and Mount Cerreta. The 442d Infantry advanced in the mountains which marked the eastern border of the Ligurian coastal plain. Later the same morning the power of this offensive was swelled by the commitment of the 370th Infantry. Two days later, the former antiaircraft men of the 473d Infantry joined the fight, passing through the 370th. The purpose of this attack was twofold: (1) to deceive the Germans as to the location of the main weight of the spring offensive; and (2) the capture of Massa Carrara (chief source of the world's supply of fine

white marble), the naval base of La Spezia, and the port of Genova (Genoa). Opposition was bitter, but by 9 April important gains had been made and the 92d was on its way to Massa.

The second blow came on 9 April when Eighth Army went all out in a smashing offensive that carried its diverse members—Indians, Poles, Canadians, British, New Zealanders, and Italians—across the Senio River in the southeast corner of the Po Valley. The New Zealand 2d Division, commanded by Lt.Gen. Sir Bernard Freyberg, played a prominent part in the crossing. The attack was preceded by a tremendous artillery and aerial bombardment and was supported by flamethrowers. A thousand heavy and medium bombers roared over the German lines, dropping more than 450 tons of bombs into an area only a few miles square. One correspondent spoke of the artillery barrage as "the biggest weight of artillery ever used on a front of corresponding size anywhere in the Mediterranean. It was far bigger even than that employed at El Alamein."

By 12 April, the date on which the main Fifth Army blow was to fall, Eighth Army had crossed the next water barrier in the flat marshlands, the Santerno River. The weather forecast, however, was unfavorable for heavy bombers, so the Fifth Army attack was postponed. The 13th came and went, with no improvement in the weather. By the 14th the troops of the 92d Division, moving up the west coast, had taken Massa and Carrara and were pushing on.

Early on the morning of the 14th the weather cleared and at 0715 hours General Truscott ordered the attack to begin at 0830 hours. At 0830, swarms of bombers in wave after wave swept over the tense Fifth Army fighting men as they looked up at them from their foxholes, slit trenches, and stone houses. Over the German lines the bombers dropped their loads and the enemy positions rocked with the punishing thunder of explosives. Caves, dug-outs, and emplacements were blasted with the roaring, pounding bombardment. Shortly before 0910 hours there was a momentary pause and a strange silence as the smoke and dust mingled in a twisted, powdered haze. But the Germans did not move. They knew from experience that this was only the beginning. Precisely at 0910 hours the artillery opened up. It was one of the biggest artillery shows of the war. The noise was deafening and the devastation widespread.

The 10th Mountain Division was making the main effort for IV Corps, and in support of this division the 85th Division Artillery (less the 329th FA Battalion) took part in a 35-minute artillery barrage immediately preceding the attack. When the infantry met stiff resistance, Division Artillery continued to fire supporting missions. The 910th

FA Battalion fired 3,441 rounds as a reinforcing battalion in twenty-four hours.

The 10th Mountain Division, with two regiments abreast, was already moving forward at 0935 hours and the great Po Valley offensive was on! Fifth and Eighth Armies were now both in it. At 1645 hours, the 1st Armored Division attacked, and by dusk the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, the 371st Infantry, and the 365th Infantry were lunging forward.

The enemy fought back furiously, putting up an especially bitter fight against the 1st Armored Division in the ruins of Vergato. But IV Corps pushed on steadily, taking its casualties in stride, as replacements moved up swiftly to fill the ranks of the fallen.

All this time, II Corps had been silent with its guns pointing menacingly at the throat of Bologna. Finally it, too, joined the battle. At noon on 15 April, a thousand heavy and medium bombers pummelled German positions before Bologna, along the enemy line which crossed and blocked Highway 64 and 65. This bombing attack did tremendous damage. But, again, this was only the start. At 2230 hours that night a crushing thirty-minute artillery barrage began falling and when it lifted the South African 6th Armoured Division and the 88th Division were already in motion. At 0300 hours on the 16th, the U.S. 91st and 34th Divisions attacked, supported on the right by the Italians of Legnano Group. The whole Fifth Army, with the exception of the crack 85th Division, was now pounding its way toward the Po Valley.

The 85th, in army reserve during the initial phases of the offensive, found itself playing an unaccustomed role. In the two previous major offensives, against the Gustav Line and the Gothic Line, it had been right up on position, slugging it out to effect a breakthrough. Now, like a fullback on a football team, it was poised in the backfield ready to plunge into any part of the line that showed signs of weakness.

On 14 April General Coulter received the following letter from the 15th Army Group commander, General Clark:

"Dear General Coulter:

"Today the 85th Infantry Division completes a year of action in Italy. I could not let such an outstanding occasion pass without noting the magnificent contribution made by the officers and men of the 85th as part of Fifth Army in the success of the 15th Army Group.

"The past year has been a truly glorious one for your Division. The participation in the capture of Rome and the cracking of the Gothic Line are two of its many achievements, contributing greatly to the de-

feat of the enemy in Italy. The capture of Monte Altuzzo by the 85th Division after a violent five-day battle loosened the German grip on the entire Gothic Line, a well fortified position defended by the enemy's best troops.

"Having been in intimate contact with the Division's regiments and battalions during my days at Fifth Army, I am well aware of the quality of its work under your superior leadership. From its initial action at Minturno through the Gothic Line to its present position, its men have shown the utmost aggressiveness in materially aiding in the destruction of the German armies in Italy.

"Now the time is at hand for us to deliver the final and decisive blow, and I am confident that the 85th Division is ready to do its part in inflicting crushing defeat upon the enemy.

"Sincerely,

"MARK W. CLARK"

On 13 April the 85th, in the Lucca area, had received warning to be prepared to move on short notice. Effective 14 April, the Division was placed on a six-hour alert and, effective at the same time, the 338th Combat Team was to be prepared to move promptly on receipt of orders. On 16 April Fifth Army ordered the 85th to move CT 338 at once to the vicinity of Africa, behind the 1st Armored Division. On the 17th, orders were received to move the remainder of the Division to the same area immediately. When it had completely closed in to its new area at 1830 hours, the 85th was attached to IV Corps.

On the 17th, also, the 85th got its battle orders. The Division was ordered to relieve the 1st Armored Division and elements of the 10th Mountain Division within its zone without delay. On the morning of the 18th, the Custermen were to continue the attack north on the right flank of IV Corps in order to clear Highway 64 within its zone, secure an exit into the Po Valley, and assist the advance of II Corps. Relief of elements of the 10th Mountain Division was to be made by the 337th Infantry. The 338th, with the 85th Reconnaissance Troop attached, was ordered to relieve elements of the 1st Armored Division within its zone. Both assault regiments would have the support of Division Artillery. The 339th Infantry, led by its new commander, Lt.Col. John T. English, was initially in corps reserve to be used only upon the approval of the army commander. The 329th Field Artillery Battalion arrived in the 85th Division's area from the area of the 92d Division on 18 April. Component units of Division Artillery were now assembled west of Highway 64 and generally south of the road leading west from Africa.

The Custer Division entered the Po Valley offensive west of the Reno River in the hills and ridges north of Vergato. The first hills, which were also the highest in the Division's zone, were about 1,800 feet high. In the western part of the zone there were sloping pasture lands and wooded areas. In the eastern part, the ridges were sharply cut and eroded. The only first-class road leading north toward the Po Valley in this area was Highway 64. It was mined, however, for a considerable stretch and bridges and culverts were blown. In addition, the enemy still held positions in the hills which bordered the road. The roads west of the highway were mere wagon trails which wound and twisted their way over the steep slopes. Many of these had to be widened so that supply vehicles could use them.

The 85th was to attack toward the northeast against the dominating hills, Mount Luminasio and Mount Terranera. Beyond these obstacles, the drive was to continue toward the Po Valley, fourteen kilometers away, on a six-kilometer front. As the hills neared the valley in this area, they were less and less high. There were many farmhouses in this relatively prosperous country, but there were few villages of more than ten buildings.

Enemy units initially opposing the Division were elements of the 94th Infantry Division and elements of the 8th (formerly the 157th) Mountain Division. However, at the start of the 85th Division's attack, these forces had already begun falling back in some disorder under the weight of the IV Corps attack in the area between the Reno and the Samoggia Rivers.

Marching up over hills and dusty trails on the night of 17-18 April and on the morning of 18 April, the 337th and 338th Infantry Regiments relieved elements of the 10th Mountain and 1st Armored Divisions. The 85th Reconnaissance Troop, attached to the 338th, screened the right flank of the regiment during the relief. IV Corps reserve, the 339th RCT, remained in an assembly area near Riola.

Strong supporting units were now attached to the 85th to swell the power of its blows against the weakening enemy. Company B, 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company B, 751st Tank Battalion; and the 1st Platoon of Battery A, 105th AAA AW Battalion (SP) were attached on 18 April.

At 0930 in the clear, warm sunlight of 18 April, the 85th Division launched a coordinated attack, following a heavy, fifteen-minute artillery barrage. The 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, struck out swiftly and met no opposition. It did round up a number of enemy stragglers, however, many of whom had been cut off from their units by the 85th Division Artillery's fire. The capture of these prisoners indicated that

the enemy was disorganized. Before nightfall, the 2d Battalion had seized the town of Luminasio. The 338th's 3d Battalion also advanced rapidly, taking several high points and communities without opposition. Dense minefields were encountered in the advance toward the village of Lama, but the town itself was captured by troops of Company I before midnight.

Units of the South African 6th Armoured Division, coming up on the right, were now moving into the zone of the 338th, so the 338th was withdrawn and became Division reserve. Colonel Mikkelsen's regiment now prepared to swing in behind the 337th or move into the attack on the left.

The 337th, meanwhile, attacking on the left of the Division's sector, made fast progress against little resistance. Mount Luminasio fell to the 2d Battalion without a shot being fired. By noon, the 1st Battalion was eight hundred yards north of Mount Bonsara. Resistance stiffened sharply, however, in the afternoon of the 18th, along the Lagune–Mount Grolla ridge. An attack against this ridge was made by the 2d and 3d Battalions but it was met by strong machine-gun and rifle fire. The attack was abruptly broken off, however, when a sudden boundary change imposed by higher headquarters placed the ridge out of the Division's sector.

These two battalions now shifted to the west where they joined the 1st Battalion, already in the new zone. The 1st Battalion moved out along a ridge road leading toward Rasiglio. The troops made good progress for a while, but they suddenly ran into heavy fire from enemy positions at La Collina, four hundred yards to their right. The main force of the battalion continued on to Rasiglio, but one company, supported by tanks and a platoon of 57mm antitank guns, moved against Collina. This company was forced to make a number of determined rushes and engage in hard fighting lasting late into the afternoon before the enemy was routed.

On the night of 19 April the Division was ordered to continue the attack into the Po Valley. The 1st and 3d Battalions of the 337th immediately ran into strong enemy resistance, however. The Germans defended Tigano bitterly and heavy fighting raged at Casetta and at Mount Rocca. The 337th's I&R Platoon was able to push on along the Lavina River road and seize undefended Gesso.

While the hill battles were still in progress, the 337th received further orders to take the high ground overlooking Casalecchio in order to assist II Corps to debouch into the Po Valley. North of Ceretoto, which was cleared only after heavy fighting, the 337th was stopped by fire from enemy self-propelled guns and by a heavy volume of light

artillery and mortar fire. The Germans were still trying to hold Casalecchio, but as the 337th approached, supporting fire from five artillery battalions came crashing down upon the town in aid of the attack. By dark, elements of the South African 6th Armoured Division, coming up on the right, had entered the town and the 337th manned an outpost line running from Casalecchio to the Communale bridge over the Lavina River. During the night, the 2d Battalion, 337th, manning these positions, was forced to fight off three separate counterattacks.

Changes in troop dispositions were now put into effect, and the 351st Infantry (88th Division) took over the positions occupied by the 2d Battalion, 337th. Meanwhile, the 338th moved up to continue the attack into the Po Valley and the 337th passed to Division reserve.

The flat wheat and rice fields of the Po Valley now stretched out before the Custer Division. Innumerable hard, straight roads led northward toward the Po River and the Alps beyond. Referring to the Po Valley in 1902, Hilaire Belloc wrote:

"Lombardy is an alluvial plain. That is the pretty way of putting it. The truth is more vivid if you say that Lombardy is as flat as a marsh and that it is made up of mud. Of course, this mud dries when the sun shines on it, but mud it is and mud it will remain. Lombardy has no forests, but any amount of groups of trees. It is cultivated in fields more or less square. The trees are not high, but there are no open views in Lombardy. Every river and brook is rolling mud."

In the midst of the 1945 Po Valley offensive, the mud was swirling, fine, powdered dust. It covered the shoes, clothing, helmets, and faces of the soldiers so thickly that men who were close friends had great difficulty in recognizing one another. "Who's this? Jones?" "Are you Abbott?" were common questions heard as men tried to peer behind the coating of white dust that covered each face. Many of the men wore rubber-rimmed goggles and rubber dust masks and, so attired, looked vaguely like men from Mars.

It was clear now that the enemy was retreating in great haste to avoid being trapped south of the Po River. Custermen were now capturing complete German field kitchens in which the food was still cooking and bakeries where the freshly made bread was still warm. Just above Highway 9 they were overrunning abandoned rear installations, warehouses, ammunition dumps, and rear command posts. Along the roads were many enemy vehicles, some of them destroyed by the Germans, some by the Allies, and as many more undamaged—only out of gas.

The Germans had now been driven out of their great defenses in the Apennines. Routed, with no coherent order of battle, they now fell

into a state of confusion. Scattered enemy units attempted to organize on their own and offer delaying action, but they were attacked and captured before they could begin to fight. So hard pressed were the Germans that they took to the roads in flight in daylight, flaunting certain Allied aerial attack. The offensive had now turned into a rat-race. Forward movement was swift and artillery support became less and less important. In order to keep up with the infantry, the artillery moved day and night, constantly leapfrogging batteries to keep pace. Prisoners poured into the Division cages by hundreds every day. This complicated the transportation problem for all available trucks were needed to maintain supplies. The infantry was already outstripping forward supply dumps. Large numbers of prisoners were evacuated by marching, but as the distances became greater, trucks were needed. In many cases, captured German trucks were filled up with gas, turned about, and used for prisoner evacuation.

On the afternoon of 20 April the 338th was recommitted, this time in the left of the Division's zone, with orders to cut Highway 9 and seize the line of the Samoggia River from San Giacomo del Martignone to Ponte Samoggia. With the 85th Reconnaissance Troop preceding the advance, the regiment moved forward with the 3d Battalion on the right and the 1st on the left. The 2d Battalion was in reserve, following the 3d. A temporary halt was made at midnight and then the companies went down out of the hills and into the Po Valley. The advance was rapid and almost unopposed. The Custermen swept down the last winding roads and reached Highway 9, crossing it without interference. The 85th Reconnaissance Troop, however, ran into a fire fight near Masetti. It fought for three hours in the face of self-propelled-gun and mortar fire, but finally reduced the resistance with the aid of an out-flanking movement by infantrymen. Before noon on 21 April, Company K, 338th, had pushed on three kilometers north of Highway 9.

Meanwhile, the 338th's 1st Battalion had set out for the Po Valley at about dusk on 20 April. By 0500 hours the following morning, it had cut Highway 9. The battalion continued its advance the following day in a column of companies, with the troops of Company B, the leading unit, riding on tanks. They moved through Sant' Agata Bolognese which had been abandoned by the enemy and drove on to the south bank of the Panaro River, which they reached before dawn of 22 April.

The 2d Battalion, which had joined the attack on the morning of 21 April, advanced on the right of the 3d Battalion in a column of companies. It encountered considerable small-arms fire on one occasion but quickly eliminated the opposition with the aid of 57mm guns. The

only other serious opposition encountered by the battalion at this time was at a point north of Highway 9 and east of Massetti where a hundred rounds of light artillery fire fell in the space of an hour. Shortly after noon on 21 April the battalion was ordered to halt to allow elements of the 88th Division to pass through its zone.

Colonel English's regiment had been attached to the 1st Armored Division on 20 April. The 1st Armored was then advancing down the Samoggia River valley on the left of the 10th Mountain Division. At 0530, 21 April, the 339th closed in the vicinity of Casaccia and Palazza and became reserve for the 1st Armored. The regiment had hardly begun to get set up, however, when the 1st Battalion, commanded by Lt.Col. Richard Webster, was alerted for immediate use in protecting the left flank of the 1st Armored Division. These troops moved at once to the high ground west of the Torrente Chiaietta and took over a roadblock on the road east of Ciano. The situation was now becoming fluid, however, so at noon on 21 April the 339th was relieved from attachment to the 1st Armored Division, reverted to 85th Division control, and became Division reserve.

Early the same morning, Saturday, 21 April, Bologna fell. Troops of the 133d Infantry (34th Division) roared up Highway 65 into the city on tanks of the 752d Tank Battalion. Elements of the 91st Division joined the 34th; and, coming up into the city from the southeast along Highway 9 was Eighth Army's Polish II Corps. This was a day of great jubilation. Bologna was in Allied hands! Bologna—famed for its leaning towers, its Etruscan Museum, and its sausages. The city contained 130 churches, twenty monasteries, and a university. It had been famed in medieval times for its school of art and its school of law. It was truly an old city—a city of columns and arcades, full of picturesque nooks and striking buildings.

Field Marshal Alexander said of the achievement, "The capture of Bologna is a victory that belongs to every Allied fighting man—soldier, sailor, and airman—in the Italian theater of war."

The fall of Bologna was an event that sparked an already fast-moving offensive to a tremendous avalanche of fast driving power. General Clark said, "Now British, New Zealand, Indian Army, Polish, Brazilian, South African, Jewish, Italian, and American troops will drive forward to destroy the enemy."

The 91st Division was now already on its way north of Bologna; the 10th Mountain Division, which had also cut Highway 9, was moving rapidly toward the Po River; and the 85th Division with its leading

regiment (the 337th) motorized, was also driving hard for the south bank of the Po.

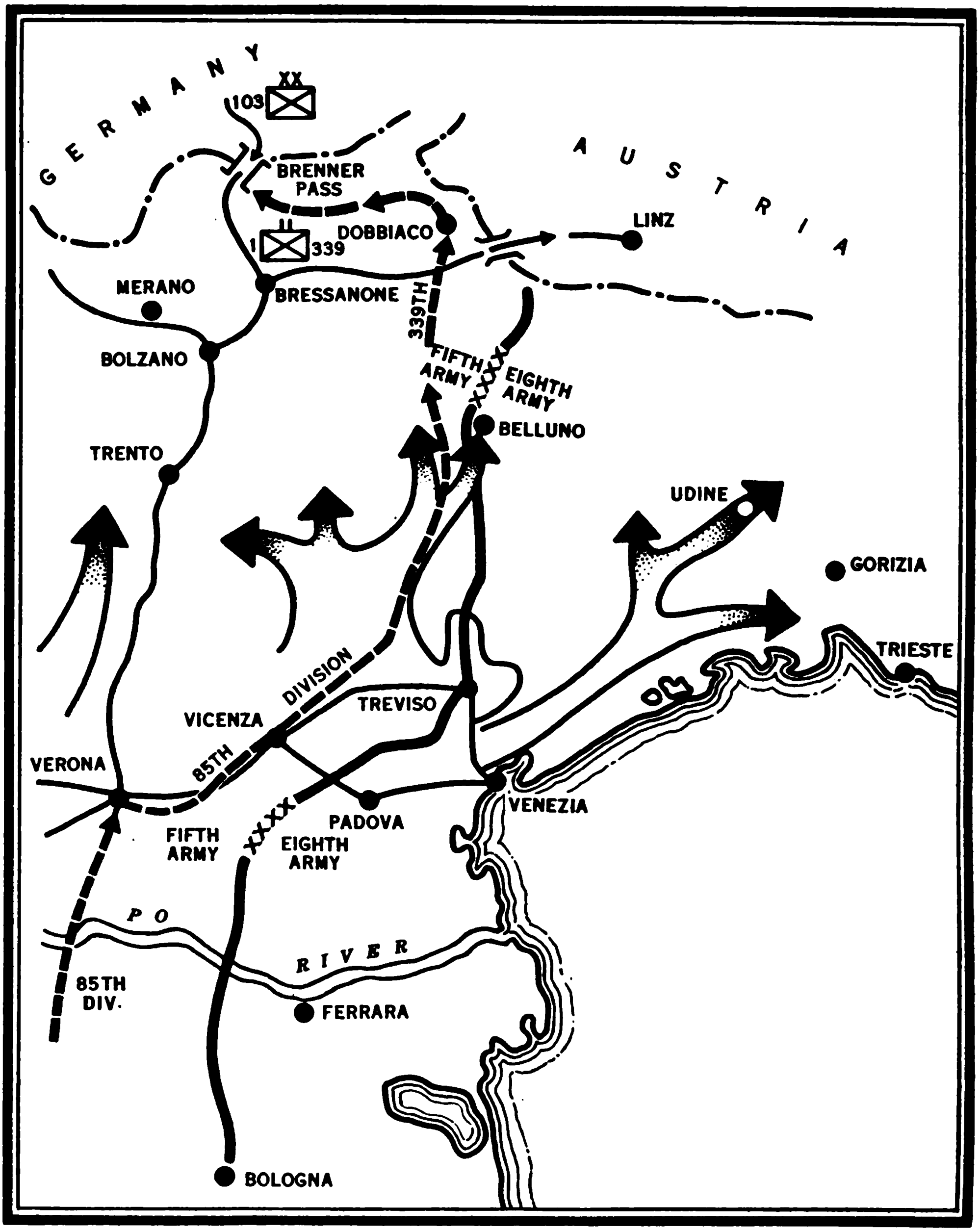
The 337th had passed through the 338th and continued the attack. At 0600, 22 April, the 85th Reconnaissance Troop was detached from the 338th Infantry and attached to the 337th. At 0700, Company B, 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was detached from the 338th and attached to the 337th.

The enemy was now in a state of complete disorganization. Scattered Germans were trying frantically to reach the Po. Prisoners were coming in by hundreds from the 65th, the 114th, the 232d, and 305th Infantry Divisions and the 90th Panzergrenadier Division, as well as from many service units. It was now clear that Fifth Army was advancing through an army in flight. Thousands of the enemy were trapped. Many gave up without a fight; many were harassed or rounded up by Partisans. Virtually all were astounded by the speed of the assault.

On the night of 21 April, the 337th assembled near Budrie and organized in task forces, reinforced by tanks, tank destroyers, engineers, and the 85th Reconnaissance Troop. At 0900 on 22 April the 3d Battalion of the 337th passed through the 3d Battalion of the 338th, and headed for the Camposanto bridge, which it had been ordered to capture intact, if possible. The 2d Battalion, which was on the left, moved out to cross the Panaro to the west of Camposanto. The 1st Battalion started out on foot with instructions to exploit the first crossing which might be established. Company C was motorized to act as a mobile regimental reserve.

The stone bridge at Camposanto was still undamaged and it was important that it be taken, for the Panaro River defenses were extensive, and the river itself, flowing through steep banks, was a serious obstacle.

The Germans laid down a heavy volume of fire from positions north of the river as elements of the 85th Recon Troop and a platoon of Company K approached the bridge. It was 1000, 22 April. The Germans realized tardily that American troops were moving swiftly toward the bridge and that they had a good chance of taking it. The 1097th Security Battalion, it was learned later, had been sent from the vicinity of Bologna to aid the German troops defending this bridge. The Germans now sent some of their men forward to set off the demolition charges which had been placed on the bridge. The 337th quickly took up positions and, aided by the Recon Troop, drove the enemy back. The situation was now ripe for some swift, daring action by the Custer Division. Here lay a bridge, the capture of which would immensely speed up the 85th Division's pursuit of the enemy, who was obviously pulling back toward the Alps and his Austrian strongholds. Who was



Map 13: Across the Po Valley and into the Alps. (Scale 1 inch=39 miles)

going to reach these areas of possible prolonged defense first? Every moment's delay gave the enemy a better chance of winning out.

The daring action was not long in coming. A noncom of the 310th Engineer Battalion plunged into the muddy waters and swam the river. Exposed to enemy fire, he coolly took his wire cutters and cut the wires leading to the demolition charges; the bridge was safe—for the moment. The enemy struck back immediately and the fight became intense. The rest of Company K had now come up. A special group of approximately

platoon strength almost immediately took to the water. The men swam across the river and obtained an insecure foothold on the north bank. The Germans were now making a fierce effort to recapture the bridge so that they could blow it up. From buildings in the nearby village came a great volume of fire from 40mm antiaircraft guns and light artillery. Two Tiger tanks and several self-propelled guns moved up and began firing against the tanks supporting the 337th. Company I, 337th, now joined in the battle. The men of this company moved over to attack the enemy defenders east of the bridge, but they made little progress against heavy machine-gun and rifle fire.

The 2d Battalion, 337th, now moved up in an effort to outflank the enemy from the west. The battalion reached and crossed the Panaro on the bridge at Bomporto at about the same time that a hundred of the enemy defenders of the Camposanto bridge launched a strong counterattack against the left flank of the 3d Battalion. The counterattack was repulsed and the 337th then went over to the offensive in a strong blow which was aided by heavy mortar and artillery fire. The Camposanto bridge was captured intact! The 337th then went on to seize the village of Camposanto.

Colonel Hughes was now ordered to move his men with all possible speed to the Po River. No one had had much sleep in the past few days, but the ultimate success of this campaign now hinged on relentless pursuit. Hughes started his units moving at midnight, with the 3d Battalion on the right and the 2d on the left, both motorized. The men snatched an hour or two of sleep where they could before their time to join the advancing columns. They curled up on a blanket or a shelter half or lay down fully dressed on the stone floor of a building. Many threw themselves on the ground by the side of the road; others slept sitting up in jeeps or weapons carriers. Beards were long and eyes were bloodshot, but the scent of a tremendous victory was in the air and it acted as a stimulant that kept tired feet moving and heavy eyelids, behind the wheels of jeeps and trucks, open, fastened on the ribbons of roads that stood out faintly in the inky blackness of the night. Every now and then a crashing artillery shell flared up with a red glow as it exploded a short distance ahead of the advancing troops or off to their right or left front. The all-night chase was on. Many of the infantry troops were up on tanks riding toward the Po River.

As the 337th moved forward, it overran many abandoned installations and vehicles. The regiment's instructions were to push on speedily, by-passing all towns and occupied places. By 0700 large numbers of prisoners had been taken. By 1045, 23 April, elements of the 3d Battalion task force had reached the bank of the Po River above Quin-

gentelo. By 1230 the same day men of the 2d Battalion had roared up to the south bank of the river. After brief, sharp fighting at Revere and Pieve de Coriano, the 337th set up a defense line along the river bank.

Prisoners were now coming in fast, large numbers of them surrendering without resistance. In the twenty-four hours from noon to noon, 23-24 April, a total of 2,543 prisoners was taken by the Division, and 1,791 gave up to the Custermen the next day.

During all this time, the 339th Infantry had been extremely busy. On 21 and 22 April, Colonel English's regimental combat team had moved down out of the hills and into the Po Valley. The Polar Bears were already tired, for as reserve on call by the army commander, they had shifted about from one side of the Division's sector to the other, prepared to be thrown in at several crucial spots. The attack progressed swiftly, however, and the occasion for commitment did not arise. Now, however, the 339th received an important assignment. Orders were given to follow the advance of the 337th toward the Po. The 337th was to by-pass pockets of enemy resistance, its main mission being to get to the river as soon as possible. The 339th was ordered to come along behind the 337th, take on the pockets of resistance by-passed by the 337th, and clean them out.

Once in the valley, Colonel English set up his CP in a large farmhouse, to which he immediately summoned his key officers. They were his three battalion commanders, Lt.Cols. Dick Webster, John Hesse, and Richard Smith; his operations officer, Major William Owens; his intelligence officer, Major Marion S. Sigovich; his supply officer, Major Lewis Martin; his Cannon Company commander, Capt. Rufus Hallmark; his communications officer, Capt. Lee Haas; his transportation officer, Capt. William Potstock; his Service Company commander, Capt. John Bell; and his headquarters commandant, Capt. John Brennan. One of the Colonel's first acts was to send a liaison party made up of an officer and radio men forward to maintain contact with the 337th. Then he set about announcing his plans for a swift, aggressive forward movement. The orders came quickly, crisply: the 339th would strike, and strike hard.

The first call for action came when the 337th was snarled in the vital fight for the bridge at Camposanto. The 3d Battalion of the 339th was attached to the 337th Infantry at 1730 hours, 22 April, with orders to seize the north end of the bridge after cleaning up a pocket of the enemy at Solara. However, when the battalion reached Solara, the enemy had already been put to flight and the 337th was occupying the

village of Camposanto. The battalion reverted to control of the 339th.

On 23 April the 339th swarmed across the Panaro River at Bomporto and, rejoined by the 3d Battalion, drove northward toward the sizable town of Mirandola, mopping up scattered groups of the enemy as it went. Reports from Partisans and reconnaissance elements indicated that the Germans had concentrated a large number of tanks in Mirandola and were prepared to use them to hold up the advance of the Division. The 339th pushed on, prepared to meet the threat. The 3d Battalion, moving up on the right, entered Medolla and found the enemy had fled. Then, as the regiment moved closer to Mirandola, ready to launch a lightning offensive that would seize the town, it met with a unit of the 91st Reconnaissance Troop, made up of three scout cars and five tanks. The commander asked to be allowed to attach his unit to the 3d Battalion. This was arranged and an entire platoon of Company L mounted the tanks. Other companies of the battalion loaded on jeeps and trucks and all set out for Mirandola. The enemy attack failed to materialize, however, and the 339th found Mirandola already occupied by friendly troops.

The 3d Battalion was now completely motorized, and was ordered to push on at once and capture Poggio Rusco. It moved out promptly and headed for the new objective. About three kilometers south of the town, the leading elements of the battalion halted and quickly prepared for a fight as a group of the enemy was observed running toward prepared positions along the road. Just as the battalion was about to attack, and before a shot was fired, one of the enemy advanced and offered to surrender his entire group, made up of forty men. The prisoners were taken at once, but, as a measure of precaution, the troops continued the advance to Poggio Rusco on foot. A brief skirmish developed, but the enemy was no match for the 339th men. The 3d Battalion took 150 prisoners here and acquired three enemy vehicles. At the same time, other elements of the battalion deployed and captured sixty-eight Germans from a nearby supply unit. This area was now entirely cleared up, so the battalion moved on into Revere and occupied a line along the Po River to the north and west and made plans at once to cross the river.

In the meantime, the 2d Battalion, 339th, had captured the villages of Cavezzo, San Possidonio, and Concordia, by-passed by the 337th. By early evening, 23 April, the battalion's motorized patrols had reached Quistello, which had already been occupied by elements of the 337th. When the 337th arrived in Quistello, it found that the Partisans there had already captured several hundred Germans and herded them into a schoolhouse and yard. In the group of Germans captured was one

who had studied at Oxford before the war and spoke English with a pronounced British accent. He was only a corporal, but he was at once put in complete charge of the entire group of German prisoners for the purpose of giving them translated orders given to him by the American officers.

On the day of its capture, Quistello was overrun with captured horses. That is, they were in the captured town, but they had not themselves yet been captured. They were running around loose everywhere, by the dozens. A number of the Custermen were successful in roping a steed and thereby obtaining temporary transportation. Most of the rest of them fell into the hands of local farmers, whose stables had been looted by the Germans.

The 1st Battalion, 339th Infantry, in reserve initially, had moved up on the left of the 3d Battalion during the afternoon and had pushed on to the south bank of the Po River. By 2000 the same night the 1st Battalion had taken over defense positions along the bank of the river from the 337th.

The 339th spent most of the next day processing large groups of prisoners that came flocking into the area, for the regiment had been ordered not to cross the river yet.

In addition to the 85th Infantry, 10th Mountain, and 88th Infantry Divisions, the 91st Infantry Division and the South African 6th Armoured Division had now arrived at the Po River. All units were making feverish preparations for crossing. Men, guns, tanks, trucks, and supplies had to be put across the river, possibly in the face of strong enemy opposition. The enemy was known to have elaborate defenses north of the Po and it was assumed he would use them.

General Coulter was anxious to attack at once before the positions could be fully occupied. There were no bridges across the Po in the Division sector. Bridge equipment which had been coming up for use of the 85th, was at the last minute transferred to the sector of the 10th Mountain Division on the left. North of Quingentole, the Po River was about three hundred feet wide. It ran in a swift current between wide, sandy beaches. General Coulter ordered the 337th Infantry to cross at once and, accordingly, early on the morning of 24 April, after a sleepless night of preparation, the companies of the 337th moved into positions on the beaches. A smoke barrage was laid down on the north bank and then ninety-six artillery guns let go with a fifteen-minute preparation. Promptly at 0830 seventy assault boats, loaded with troops, pushed off into the river. At 0844 the first wave hit the north bank. There was no enemy fire. At 0900, as the first

troops across were pushing ahead rapidly, the second wave landed on the north beach. The enemy's Po River defenses in the Division sector were completely unmanned.

Colonel Mikkelsen, meanwhile, had moved his 338th Infantry by motor and marching from assembly areas west of Mirandola to assembly areas east of Quistello by noon of 24 April. Later in the day units of the 338th crossed the Po from beaches which had been used by the 337th. The troops went across in motor launches, DUKWs, and assault boats.

Because of the absence of bridges in the Division sector, the vehicles of the Division, with the exception of the medium artillery, were taken across on four infantry support rafts and on three rafts improvised by the 310th Engineer Battalion. This was a tedious process, for only two or three vehicles, at the most, could be carried across at one time on a raft. The engineers manning the rafts, however, and the infantrymen at Red and Blue Beaches, who were controlling the flow of traffic to the rafts, worked furiously for thirty hours. At the end of that time, most of the vehicles were across. The medium artillery, the supporting armor, and many of the supplies (loaded on captured German trucks as well as organic vehicles) crossed the river on the bridge at San Benedetto Po, in the sector of the 10th Mountain Division.

The 339th Infantry began crossing the river on 25 April. Colonel English had orders to pass his regiment through elements of the 337th, which were holding a line two miles north of the river. Company A, 751st Tank Battalion, and Company B, 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were now attached to the 339th. The first elements of the 339th to cross were up early or, more accurately, had stayed up to make the crossing at 0300 hours. These forces included the I&R Platoon, the Antitank Company, and Cannon Company. Once across, these units moved out swiftly toward the north to reconnoiter the roadnet in advance of the rest of the regiment and to report the location of any centers of enemy resistance. The battalions began their crossing at 0500 hours. The 2d, 1st, and 3d Battalions crossed in that order, and by noon they had passed through the 337th. As the regiment took up the forward advance in the left sector of the Division's zone, the 2d Battalion was on the right, the 1st Battalion was on the left, and the 3d Battalion, in reserve, was following the 1st.

The Po Valley offensive was now more than a rout; it was a mad race. Assault battalions were fully motorized; GIs were riding on tanks and horses and in captured Italian and German limousines. Fifth and Eighth Armies were across the Po River in strength and were fanning out all over Northern Italy. The German failure to offer resistance

north of the Po River was incredible. Moreover, information gleaned from prisoners who were still coming in large numbers indicated that the enemy had no intention of defending either Verona or the Adige River line. The inference was that the elaborate enemy defenses north of Verona might not be manned at all. Several of the prisoners opined that there would be no organized German resistance south of the Alps.

The 85th Division pounded fiercely forward. In the 339th's zone, forward reconnaissance was made by jeeps mounting machine guns. The regiment's antitank guns swept aside automatic-weapons resistance in Fagnano, in the sector of the 2d Battalion. The 1st Battalion seized Cazzo, on Highway 10, leading northeast from Mantua, captured Castelbelforte, and pushed on toward the north.

Two battalions of the 338th Infantry now moved up and passed through the 337th. With the 85th Reconnaissance Troop reconnoitering the regiment's route of advance, the 338th swept northward against slight or no resistance. Vilimpenta, Castel d'Ario, Erbe, Trovenzuolo and Vigasio fell swiftly.

Verona now lay only thirteen kilometers away. From the 85th Division's forward positions, any number of good secondary roads led northward to the city of Romeo and Juliet, the gateway to the Brenner Pass and Southern Germany. The feel of victory was now overwhelming, feverish, exuberant. The Custer Division burned with the urge to move faster and faster. The enemy must not be allowed to organize in his Alpine strongholds.

On the night of 25-26 April, the 85th Recon Troop reached the outskirts of Verona, the first unit of the Division to arrive. At 0700 hours, 26 April, they moved into the city and by 0830 they had reached the Adige River. Close on their heels came the 338th and 339th, sweeping into the city at 0815 hours on the 26th. By 0815 forward elements of the 339th Infantry had advanced into the southern part of the city in the vicinity of the railroad marshalling yards and had cut highways 62 and 11 leading into Verona from the southwest and west. The 338th reached the city at 1000.

John Ruskin once spoke of Verona as a city of palace walls casting shadows in the streets, with a crowd of towers rising out of the shadow. Verona has long been part of a belt of fortifications, bastions, and ditches. It is partly medieval and partly a Roman city, although of the Verona of Pliny and Catullus only the famous amphitheater, two gateways, and a few unimportant remains have come down to this age. The reason for this is that because of Verona's geographical position at the foot of the Brenner Pass route to Southern Europe, the military value of Verona has been unfavorable for the preservation of antiquities.

When the Custermen reached Verona, they found a large part of the city in ruins. The bridges across the Adige River, which flows through the city, had been blown. (The hills to the north of Verona beyond the Adige were the base upon which the Germans had built the last prepared defense line south of the Alps—the Adige Line.) Many business buildings and houses in the vicinity of the rail yards had been destroyed during Allied bombings. The great rail yards themselves had been literally smashed to bits. A more mountainous mass of completely smashed and twisted wreckage had not been seen the length of Italy. Tracks had been broken, blasted and tossed in every direction; passenger and freight cars were mere splinters. Here and there a freight car hung precariously and grotesquely from a partially bombed railway bridge or, end up, rested carelessly against a section of brick wall that had miraculously survived the destruction all about. Buildings near the rail lines were mere shells or piles of rubble, where the Germans had been quick to spread their propaganda by writing in black paint amid the ruins on any section of wall that offered a writing surface: "*Opera di Liberatori*" ("The Work of the Liberators").

Verona had been a hotbed of Italian Fascist and German propaganda. In the city were housed the physical facilities for the circulation by pamphlet, poster, and sticker, of lies, half-truths, and rumors. One of the stickers, a little larger than a U.S. air-mail postage stamp, showed an American bomber, the identifying white star on the under side of the wing, zooming overhead while on the ground below, dead or dying in pools of vivid red blood, were helpless, innocent little children.

After picturing the Americans as such cruel, murderous terrorists, the Germans and the Italian Fascists, too, in a very ungentlemanly manner, tossed their cloaks of chivalry into the Adige River and took off for the hills to the north. They wouldn't stay to defend the helpless women and children from "the Anglo-American beasts."

Verona had already been occupied by elements of the 10th Mountain and 88th Infantry Divisions, but these units now moved east and west of the city, respectively. After moving into the southern part of the city, the 338th Infantry prepared to cross the Adige. The 1st Battalion, followed by the 2d and 3d, crossed the river into the center of the city by the remains of a railroad bridge. This was passable only for foot troops. Supporting vehicles were brought across the river on rafts. The 310th Engineer Battalion set up two assault-boat ferries, cleared the railroad bridge of freight cars and damaged rails, and built up earthen ramps at each end to facilitate the traffic.

The 339th Infantry had also moved up to cross the Adige, and to move north to determine whether or not the enemy was occupying the

Adige Line. All the bridges across the river had been destroyed, either by Allied bombing or by German demolition, but the 1st Battalion improvised a foot crossing over the piers and rubble remains of one bridge with the help of ladders, doors, and ropes. By 1625 hours, the entire battalion had crossed and was pushing on into the hills north of the city. The 339th's I&R Platoon, meanwhile, had discovered a small pulley ferry, operated by stream current, about six miles west of Verona, at Settimo. This was put into service at once to carry antitank guns and small vehicles across the river where they had easy access to Highway 12 leading into Verona from the northwest. A weather-beaten, elderly Italian, owner of the ferry, operated it. He had been caught up in the mad, confusing whirlpool of war and frankly confessed he did not know what was going on. "Last night," he said, "I take *Tedeschi* [Germans] across—all night; same thing night before. To-night I work for *Americani*. I no sleep in three night. Alla same to me. If boat no damage, hokay; I—how you say?—glad to help."

While the 337th remained in Verona, the other two regiments pushed on vigorously to the north. By 0300 hours on the morning of the 27th the Adige Line had been completely and hopelessly breached and elements of the Division were occupying and consolidating positions two kilometers to the north. The 88th Division had also crossed the Adige and on the 27th the South African 6th Armoured Division and the 91st Division made the crossing. The British then went across on the 28th and there were now five divisions through the Adige Line and the Germans were in full flight toward the Alps.

The 339th Infantry occupied the left half of the Division's sector and the 338th occupied the right half. Both regiments now sent out long-range motorized reconnaissance patrols along the roads leading out of the Division's sector to the north.

Prisoners were still coming in in hordes. On 26-27 April the Division took prisoners from the 65th, 94th, 148th, 278th, 155th, 305th, 334th, 362d, and the Brandenburg Infantry Divisions; the 26th Panzer Division; the 8th Mountain Division; and the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions. The prisoners came from a great variety of units—truck companies, antiaircraft battalions, assault battalions, alarm companies, tank battalions, bridge companies, sabotage units, and labor battalions. In the ranks of these units were nationals of many subject nations—Poles, Turks, Yugoslavs, Italians, Albanians, Russians, Czechs, and Austrians. Many of these groups offered to fight against the Germans.

For the last few days of the month of April the 339th continued to hold its positions north of Verona and to send out long-range patrols to clean out positions that might yet be held by the enemy. On 29

April troops of Lt.Col. Smith's 3d Battalion were sent forward to guard a radio station on Mount Castelberto, which had been turned over to the 85th by the Partisans. This mountain was the point of farthest advance north in this sector by elements of the Division.

In this same period, 338th maintained an arc of defensive positions blocking the approaches to Verona, while the 337th patrolled the streets of Verona on 27-28 April and then for the last two days of the month moved to the southern outskirts of the city.

The 85th was now about to leave IV Corps. Appreciation of the services of the Custermen was expressed by the IV Corps commander, General Crittenberger, in a letter of commendation to the Commanding General, 85th Infantry Division. The letter read, in part:

". . . The superior performance of its missions by the 85th Infantry Division as a part of IV Corps during the spring offensive from 17 April to 27 April, inclusive, was a matter of great satisfaction to this headquarters, and I desire, hereby, officially to commend you and the officers and men of your command for your splendid work. . . .

"The 85th Infantry Division exhibited high combat efficiency in its methodical advance and contributed in great measure to our mission of assisting the advance of II Corps in the capture or encirclement of Bologna.

"In this spectacularly successful operation which decisively defeated the Germans in our front . . . IV Corps is proud of its battlefield association with your magnificent division."

Also, at this time, back in the United States, the Honorable John W. McCormack rose from his seat and asked permission to address the House of Representatives, with these words:

". . . I think that we should pause for a few moments and review the last two brilliant weeks in Italy. . . . We should recall, in this hour of triumph, the part of the American and Allied soldier who fought one of the toughest holding actions in history. They pinned down crack German divisions. They moved over some of the toughest terrain that any of our armies have encountered.

"After the big [Po Valley] assault got under way, our troops never really stopped. They moved forward over those heart-breaking mountains day and night. This is ground made for defense—where the enemy is always perched on a ridge looking down your throat. When you have inched up on him rock by rock, crawling, sweating, firing, crawling a little more, when you have nearly gained the ridge, he withdraws—runs hastily down the slope, through the valley, up the

next slope, and holds another ridge and you have to do it all over again. You always work uphill.

". . . Through this bitter fighting, the Germans held onto Bologna, making it the pivot city of their resistance, and there was worried talk among our troops that this might turn out to be another Aachen. The Germans had great forces gathered around Bologna. But five days of mountain-by-mountain advance brought the Fifth Army to the foothills south of Bologna and to downhill going. Two divisions, with armor, burst from the mountains into the plains—the 10th Mountain and the 85th Infantry. On the next day Bologna fell and our troops raced through and around it. All divisions were now down from the mountains and chasing the Germans across the flat northern Italian plains, in that great mass advance which our GIs and our generals have dreamed about.

". . . And let me speak finally of the foot soldier. Italy was his fight. The mountains made it mainly his fight. Let us remember the courage and endurance of the great infantry divisions—the 85th, the 88th, the 92d—a Negro division to which Japanese-American troops are now attached—and the 34th.

"These men have endured hard and cruel months of seesaw action in the lonely Apennines. For them, this winter, the arrival of a mule train was a big event. The continuous snow and the rain froze their hands and feet, gave them trench foot, and rheumatism. Their fighting has been continuous. In daytime they slept in foxholes hacked out of the rocky soil, and they prayed that the sun would come through. At night the fighting began, the fighting that must have seemed sometimes so futile, because it was so costly in lives and so poor in inches gained. The next morning we would read of them in a few unemotional lines, 'Slight patrol action south of Vergato.' But if we sometimes felt discouraged about Italy, apparently they did not. For they are now on the loose, and from the rate they have moved, their energies are fresh and their spirits high.

"These American foot soldiers have chalked up another great triumph. They are amazing young men."

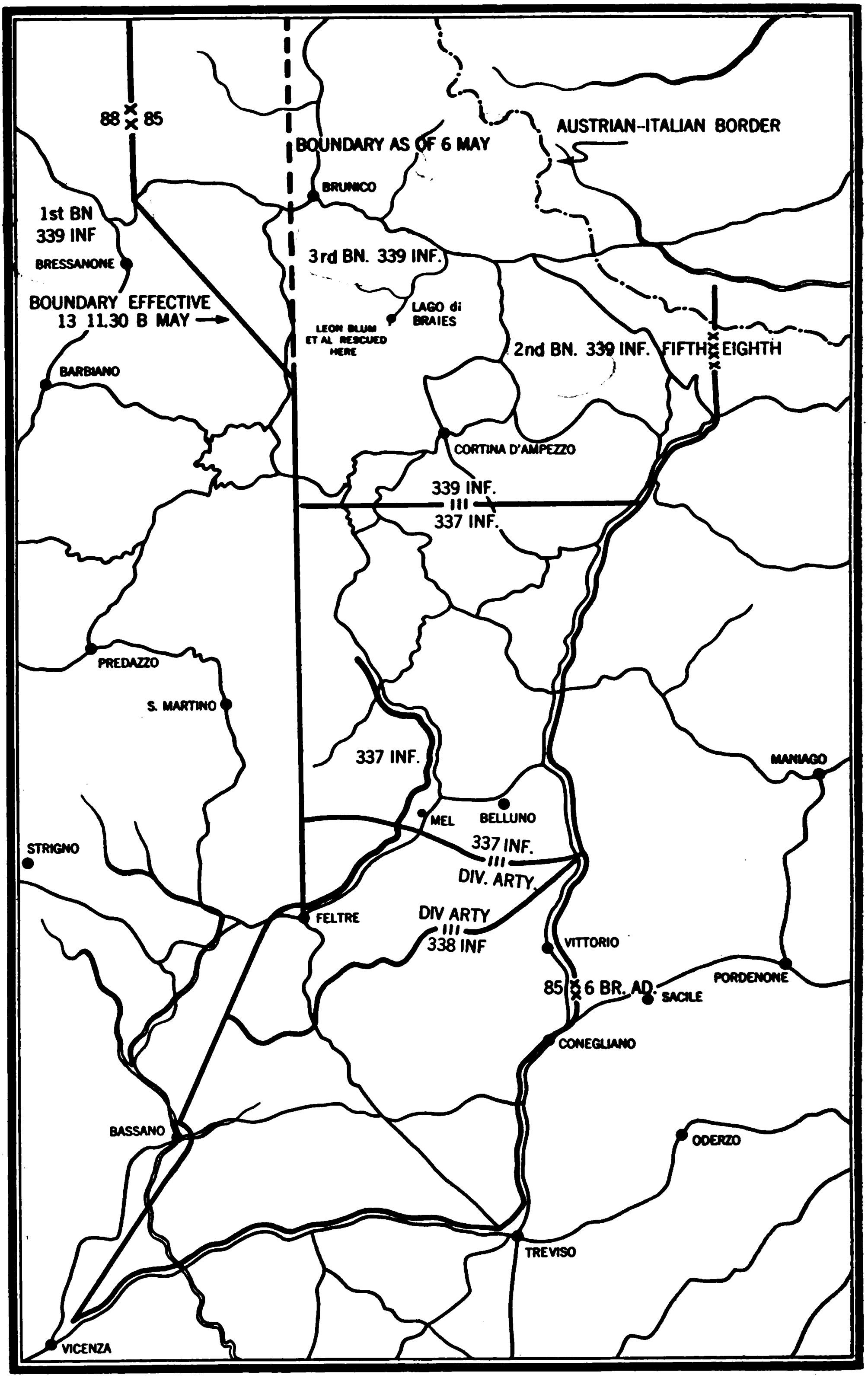
Part IX: *Victory and Inactivation*

ON 30 APRIL 1945 the 85th Division was put under the control of II Corps. General Coulter began preparations at once to move north of Vicenza and resume the offensive in the Piave River Valley. The 337th began moving into areas west of Vicenza at 1800, 30 April. The 338th Infantry relieved the 339th, occupying its own sector and that of the 339th. Colonel English assembled his troops at once in preparation for the move eastward.

Orders from II Corps instructed the 85th Division to protect the corps' right flank, maintain contact with the British 6th Division on the right and the 88th Division on the left, and seize the corps objectives within the Division's zone. With its leading elements motorized, the 337th Infantry moved out at 0800, 2 May, advancing north along the Belluno–Agordo highway. Attached to the regiment were one platoon of Company B, 100th Chemical Mortar Battalion; Company C, plus one platoon and Company D, 757th Tank Battalion; Company A, 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion; and one platoon of the 85th Reconnaissance Troop. This powerful striking force overtook an enemy column made up of the remnants of two enemy divisions. A fire fight followed and both sides suffered casualties. The German commander finally surrendered to the 337th, which then halted in the Mas–Belluno areas to process the prisoners.

Meanwhile, the 339th had been instructed to advance north. Colonel English's troops were reinforced by Company C, 310th Engineer Battalion; Company A, 757th Tank Battalion; Company C, 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion; and one platoon of the 85th Reconnaissance Troop. The 339th RCT moved forward from assembly areas and pushed to the north along the Mas–Belluno–Highway 50 route. No enemy resistance was encountered.

Meanwhile, on the rest of the 15th Army Group front, the same pattern of feeble resistance was being encountered. Great events were taking place all over Northern Italy. On 28 April the 1st Armored Division reached Lake Como. On the same day, Italian Partisans captured and shot Mussolini. The 10th Mountain Division had reached Lake Garda. Milan, Genoa, and Turin were in the hands of the Partisans. Eighth Army marched into Venice, led by the veteran 56th London (Black Cat) Division, headed by the 169th Queen's Brigade. On 30 April the commander of U.S. IV Corps, Maj.Gen. Willis D. Crittenberger, entered Milan, center of industrial Northern Italy and second largest city of Italy. On 30 April also came General Mark Clark's historic statement:



Map 14: Roundup of Germans in the Dolomite Alps.

"Troops of the 15th Army Group have so smashed the German armies in Italy that they have been virtually eliminated as a military force. This destruction has all been accomplished in the offensive which is now twenty-two days old for the Eighth Army and fifteen days old for the major part of the Fifth Army."

While the mighty Po Valley offensive was destroying twenty-five German divisions in Italy, there were anxious days of waiting at Allied Force Headquarters at Caserta for further word from General Wolff. Finally, toward the end of April, it came. General Wolff was returning to Switzerland. With him were two German officers who had been selected as plenipotentiaries to go to AFHQ with power to act for himself and for General Von Vietinghoff in surrendering the German forces in Italy and Western Austria to Field Marshal Alexander.

On 18 April General Wolff had gone to Berlin, where he conferred with Himmler. Himmler mentioned to Wolff three possible courses of action for Hitler and himself: (1) Remain in Berlin and fight it out; (2) Retreat to the Alpine stronghold; (3) Retreat by aircraft to Berchtesgaden. Two hours by motor from the center of Berlin, Wolff reportedly saw Hitler in a bunker. The German leader was low in spirits but not hopeless. He stated, substantially; "We must fight on to gain time. In two more months the break between the Anglo-Saxons and the Russians will come about and then I shall join the party which approaches me first, it makes no difference which." General Wolff tried to persuade Hitler that further destruction in Italy was senseless, but Hitler did not react to his arguments, even though 15th Army Group was even then hammering the German troops back toward the Po River.

When AFHQ received word that General Wolff and the other two German officers had arrived in Switzerland, an Army transport plane was sent on 27 April to bring the two representatives of General Wolff and General Von Vietinghoff to Caserta. With it, however, went instructions from Field Marshal Alexander that if the representatives were coming, they must be fully authorized to accept unconditional surrender. The discussions would be broken off if these conditions were not accepted.

In spite of bad weather the plane which picked up the German officers near the Switzerland border, was back at Caserta at 1600 hours the same afternoon. The German representatives were met at the airfield by Generals Lemnitzer and Airey.

The first meeting with the German representatives was held at 1800 hours and from here on the negotiations proceeded with great speed. The meeting lasted twenty minutes and was presided over by Lt.Gen.

W. D. Morgan, Chief of Staff to Field Marshal Alexander. General Morgan asked them if they had full power to act for their commanders, and they replied that, within a framework of instructions given them, they did. They presented their credentials, dated 22 April, and signed by General Von Vietinghoff and General Wolff.

General Morgan handed the representatives three copies of the instrument of surrender and its appendixes. He asked them to retire to their camp at Caserta and examine the documents. A second meeting would be held at 2100 hours the same night and at that time General Morgan would expect to be told whether the terms were accepted.

The second meeting was attended by a host of high-ranking generals and admirals, including representatives of the Red Army General Staff. An intense discussion of the details of surrender was entered into at once. General Morgan suggested that the German officers transmit the highlights of the surrender document to General Von Vietinghoff, so that the latter might set a time for the surrender to become operative. Other details of the surrender procedure were reviewed and the representative of General Von Vietinghoff said he agreed generally with the procedure outlined but that he must inform his commander of the points discussed. General Morgan pointed out that this would involve delay, which was not in the interests of the Germans themselves. The meeting adjourned and Generals Lemnitzer and Airey remained behind and conferred with the Germans until 0400 hours.

A crisis developed in the negotiations. The German representatives raised numerous objections and said they did not have the authority to accept the terms contained in the surrender document. It was now clear that if the Germans had their way, the discussions might be prolonged indefinitely. What the Germans were now obviously after was conditional unconditional surrender.

The Allied generals, however, who knew the German mind, reasoned that a firm stand would bring them around. This approach was discussed with Field Marshal Alexander and Generals McNarney and Morgan. On the following morning, the Germans were informed that unless they accepted unconditional surrender, the negotiations would terminate at once. The Germans accepted.

Shortly after 1400 hours, in General Morgan's office in the Royal Palace at Caserta, the Germans signed the instrument of surrender. At 1445 hours, less than twenty-three hours after their arrival in Caserta, the Germans were off by air for the Switzerland border. The surrender was to become effective at 1200 hours, Greenwich Mean Time, 2 May 1945.

The plane reached the Switzerland border by dark and by midnight of Sunday, 29 April, the Germans were passing through Bern.

A period of anxious waiting followed. Would the representatives reach General Von Vietinghoff's headquarters? Allied troops were closing in. Would the German commanders honor the signatures of their representatives?

An elaborate system of codes had been devised at the final parley at Caserta for wireless communication between AFHQ and the German headquarters. On Monday, 30 April, Field Marshal Alexander sent the following message to General Von Vietinghoff so that if the German representatives did not reach him, he might himself know of the signing of the surrender instrument:

"In view of the rapid advance of Allied Armies from the north toward Innsbrück, it appears that your representatives may have difficulty in reaching you with the Instrument of Surrender signed by them here. I, therefore, inform you that these officers signed honorable terms of unconditional surrender of all armed forces, land, sea, and air under your command and control to take effect at 1200 hours Greenwich Mean Time on 2 May. If by chance these officers do not reach you in time, I ask you to honor their agreement to avoid further useless bloodshed by ordering surrender agreed upon. If you can get orders to your troops before the agreed time, I urge you to end the useless struggle by doing so at once."

On Tuesday, 1 May, a wireless message from the German headquarters at Bolzano stated that the surrender would be carried out. Word also came through the same day that the German representatives had arrived back at their headquarters.

On Wednesday morning, 2 May, well before noon, the effective time of surrender, AFHQ radio receivers picked up in the clear from Bolzano German broadcasts to their troops to surrender. The Germans were carrying out the surrender terms!

At 1830 hours, 2 May, Field Marshal Alexander announced to the world that the Germans in Italy and Western Austria had surrendered to the Allies. The war in Italy was over! One million German soldiers had been knocked out of the war by this instrument of surrender which affected tremendously the speedy conclusion of hostilities throughout the rest of Europe. It set in motion the machinery for the surrender of the German armies in the west. It provided the impetus for the complete collapse of Naziism everywhere.

Immediately following the announcement of surrender, Field Marshal Alexander sent a message to the forces under his command:

"Today, the remnants of a once proud army have laid down their

arms to you—close on a million men with all their arms, equipment, and impedimenta.

"You may well be proud of this great and victorious campaign which will long live in history as one of the greatest and most successful ever waged.

"No praise is high enough for you sailors, soldiers, airmen, and workers of the United Forces in Italy for your magnificent triumph."

Although the official announcement of surrender had come, there was still much for the 85th Division to do. The 339th continued its advance rapidly toward the final objectives, with instructions not to fire unless fired upon. Late at night on 2 May, General Coulter ordered all troops of the 85th Division to halt in place. Then on 3 May he ordered the 339th Infantry to organize three forces, each composed of a motorized battalion of infantry, a battery of 105mm field artillery, a company of light or medium tanks, a platoon of tank destroyers, a company of engineers, and necessary supply, signal, and evacuation detachments, and to prepare for a rapid advance to block the Italian–Austrian frontier within the Division's zone. At noon on 3 May, the 339th, organized in this manner, resumed its northward advance, encountering no resistance. The 2d Battalion reached the Austrian border by 0415 hours, 4 May, where it blocked exit routes from Italy to Austria.

The 1st Battalion of the 339th Infantry passed through the 3d Battalion and seized the Brenner Pass at 1515 hours, 4 May, where it was the first unit of 15th Army Group to link up with the 103d Infantry Division of Seventh Army. It was a grand reunion for the elements of the two divisions, for it was like father meeting son. The 103d Division had been activated by a cadre sent from the 85th Division during training days at Camp Shelby.

A roadblock was set up at Vipiteno by the 1st Battalion. Elements of the 2d Battalion reached Arnbach in Austria at 1415 hours 4 May, and established a roadblock at this point. The 3d Battalion, reinforced, continued its advance on the Austrian border to block exit routes from Italy in its sector. The 1st Battalion was relieved by elements of the 88th Division in the vicinity of the Brenner Pass at 1700 hours on 5 May and moved to an area near Monguelfo. Not far away, at Fortezza, Company B and elements of Company C were selected to guard a large cache of captured gold.

Meanwhile, Company G, 339th, had raced to a large resort hotel near Brunico off in the woods at the foot of towering, snow-capped mountains and nestled at the shore of the "Lake of Stillness." Here they captured the Germans who were guarding a large group of noted

European nationals, prisoners of the Nazis who had recently been moved there from the German concentration camp at Dachau. Among them were Leon Blum, former Premier of France; Kurt Von Schuschnigg, former Chancellor of Austria; and Pastor Martin Niemöller, German religious leader. The CP of the 339th at this time was in the attractive little Tyrolean town of Dobbiaco. Here Lt.Col. English, commander of the regiment, was promoted to the rank of colonel. Shortly afterward, the 339th CP moved to the "Lake of Stillness" area and took over the hotel for its quarters.

The area where the 339th was now operating—the Dolomite region of the Tyrol Alps—boasted some of the grandest and wildest scenery in the world. In early May the sun was bright and the air was scented with the sweet breath of spring.

The war in all of Europe was now over. The Germans had surrendered to the Western Allies and the Russians. The hearts of Allied fighting men were filled more with a profound relief that the great ordeal was over than they were with a sense of jubilation or exultation. Representative Clare Boothe Luce took this occasion to pay high tribute to the 85th Division:

"Now that VE-day has become a fixed date in history, like the 11th of November, I want to send a special message to the men of the 85th Custer Division.

"I have looked at all the records, and I know that none can boast more historic battles and more victories than you have crowded into your thirteen and a half months of combat. The breaking of the Gothic and the Gustav Lines; the forcing of Il Giogo Pass; the capture of Monte Mezzano, where your division was the spearhead of the whole Fifth Army; all these are feats which military history will respectfully review for generations.

"When Kesselring's men dubbed you the élite assault troops of the U.S. armies, the Krauts for once were telling the plain truth. The Germans will not forget, and for years to come you will recall with pride, the list of enemy units the 85th drove back and decimated. They were the best the German Army had to offer: the Hermann Goering Panzergrenadiers, the 26th Panzergrenadiers, the 4th Parachute Division, the 26th Infantry Division, the Lehr Brigade, the 362d Grenadier Division—you know them all. You met them; you fought them; you whipped them.

"Your victories were costly as only you, the living, know from having seen the vacant ranks of those who fell. Yet your division paid the highest tribute possible to fallen comrades by continuing, in the face of twenty-five per cent casualties within two days, to complete your

mission and to gain your objective in the Gustav Line. That of itself entitles you to military immortality.

". . . Rest assured that we shall not forget, nor let the world forget the parts you played so nobly and so well."

The 339th now had a gigantic task in processing and evacuating the large numbers of surrendered enemy in the Division's zone. It was a task that took careful and intelligent planning over many days, for the German forces in the Division's zone outnumbered the strength of the 85th Division by a large figure. On the whole, the German officers were helpful in controlling the forces under their commands during the period of evacuation. One or two of the German generals didn't like the failure of GIs to snap to attention and salute them when they arrived at one of the 85th's regimental headquarters to confer with Custer Division officers on the removal of prisoners to Fifth Army POW camps. But as one of the men remarked: "I wouldn't salute him if I hung for it. Who the hell does he think he is? We won the war, not his crowd." Another German general thought the prestige of his rank would carry over into the American Army. Through an aide he sent word to Major Floyd B. Minor, commanding the 339th's 3d Battalion at the time, that Minor should report to his headquarters for a discussion on housing and prisoner evacuation. The general's ego was rudely shattered. Major Minor sent word back to him that he, and not the general, was in command of the town and that the general would report to *his* headquarters at once. The general reported.

On 26-28 May, relief of the 85th Division in its zone was carried out by the Italian Folgore Group and the elements relieved moved to the Feltre–Belluno area. The 338th Infantry had already moved there on 4 May, where it remained as Division reserve. The 339th moved to the town of Mel, midway between Belluno and Feltre.

Early in June, the Division was alerted and ordered to be prepared to move to the II Corps sector in the vicinity of Trieste. There was trouble there over the limits of the zones occupied by the Yugoslav Liberation Army. On 13 June, however, the Division was relieved from the alert status.

In the meantime, on 9 June, General Coulter had been notified by Fifth Army that the 85th Division had been classified as a Category IV unit, in the terms of the redeployment program, and that the Division would prepare for shipment to the United States in the near future. Shortly after returning to the U.S., it would be inactivated.

This did not mean, however, that the 85th would return as a unit

and that all its members would be discharged at once. Men were being discharged throughout the U.S. Army on the basis of points. Accordingly, large-scale transfers of officers and enlisted men were now undertaken. Only members of the Division who were classified as essential or who had an Adjusted Service Rating score of eight-five points or more were to remain with the Division for return to the United States. Non-essential members having less than eighty-five points were to be transferred to other units in the Mediterranean Theater. At the same time, personnel from other units in MTO who were eligible for discharge from the Army were transferred into the Division. The Division was to be prepared for inactivation while still in MTO. By the end of June, 300 officers and 6,000 enlisted men were transferred out of the Division and 250 officers and 2,500 enlisted men were received. Much of the difficult task of coordinating these transfers fell on the capable shoulders of Lt.Col. Richard Chamier, G-1 of the Division throughout its entire overseas service. His able handling of the many complex personnel problems that continually confronted the 85th was a real contribution to its success.

The great 85th Division fighting team was broken up. There were tears in many eyes as hands clasped powerfully in final farewell as one after another the Custermen took leave of their buddies, grabbed their duffel bags, and climbed onto the trucks that were to carry them to their new units. Many of the men broken down and wept openly—hard, toughened fighting men who had smashed German divisions to bits. They were saying goodbye to men they had lived with, trained with, and fought with for three years.

While the transfers were being effected, vocational and educational training was expanded, in addition to normal military training carried out daily preparing men for possible use in the Pacific Theater. Through facilities offered by the Army Education Program, unit schools were established throughout the Division. Instructors were chosen from qualified personnel of each unit and a great variety of courses were offered.

On 23 June the Division was ordered to prepare to move to the Volturno Redeployment Training Area, northwest of Caserta, in the early part of July. By 12 July it had completed its move to the Volturno area and it spent the period 12 July to 14 August training and preparing for shipment to the United States. On 14 August, all training and other activities were suspended in order to give full time to preparations for shipment.

On 16 August, after a brief, but impressive farewell ceremony at the dock and aboard ship, the 85th Infantry Division sailed on the USS

West Point from the port of Naples. As the ship gathered speed, the graciously curving shore line of the harbor of Naples and the menacing height of nearby, towering Mount Vesuvius faded into the gathering twilight.

At long last the terrible, bitter struggle was over and the Custermen could go home to their loved ones who had prayed and yearned for their return.

Behind them lay Minturno, Tremensuoli, the Alban Hills, Rome, Florence and the Arno Valley, the Apennines, the Po Valley, Verona, the Dolomite Alps. Behind them also were those Custermen who would never sail home—men like Anthony Tozzo, Russell Clark, Luther Carroll, Stanley Nash, James H. Roberts, James Mulcahy, Robert Waugh, Louis Gallagher, Peter Kubina, Barton Wilkerson, George D. Keathley—men from the farms, factories, schools and business houses of America. They were just ordinary guys who rose to extraordinary heights of courage. Now they lay beneath the soil of Italy in neat cemeteries, marked with white crosses, near where they fell in action in the fight for freedom.

Thus ended the three-year World War II career of the 85th Infantry Division. One of the most highly trained divisions in the United States Army, it had spent nineteen months in training camps and on maneuvers in the United States. It had spent over thirteen months in combat in three major campaigns and had fought over some of the worst fighting terrain in the world. It had scored unexpected, brilliant victories. It had been more than an outstanding division. In the words of military observers who had watched its progress, it had been a magnificent fighting unit.

The Division landed at Hampton Roads, Virginia, on 25 August 1945 and moved by train to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. There, at 2400 hours, 26 August 1945, the 85th Infantry Division was inactivated and passed into history.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: *Medal of Honor Citations*

Sergeant Chritos H. Karaberis (Army serial No. 31,176,795), leading a squad of Company L, 337th Infantry Regiment, Army of the United States, on the night of 1-2 October 1944 near Guignola, Italy, gallantly cleared the way for the company's approach along a ridge toward its objective, the Casoni di Romagna. When his platoon was pinned down by heavy fire from enemy mortars, machine guns, machine pistols, and rifles, he climbed in advance of his squad on a maneuver around the left flank to locate and eliminate the enemy gun positions. Undeterred by deadly fire that ricocheted off the barren, rocky hillside, he crept to the rear of the first machine gun and charged, firing his submachine gun. In this surprise attack, he captured eight prisoners and turned them over to his squad before striking out alone for a second machine gun. Discovered in his advance and subjected to direct fire from the hostile weapon, he leaped to his feet and ran forward, weaving and crouching, pouring automatic fire into the emplacement that killed four of its defenders, and forced the surrender of a lone survivor. He again moved forward through heavy fire to attack a third machine gun. When close to the emplacement, he charged with a nerve-shattering shout and burst of fire. Paralyzed by his whirlwind attack, all four gunners immediately surrendered. Once more advancing aggressively in the face of a thoroughly alerted enemy, he approached a point of high ground occupied by two machine guns which were firing on his company on the slope below. Charging the first of these weapons, he killed four of the crew and captured three more. The six defenders of the adjacent position, cowed by the savagery of his assault, immediately gave up. By his one-man attack, heroically and voluntarily undertaken in the face of tremendous risks, *Sergeant Karaberis* captured five enemy machine gun positions, killed 8 Germans, took 22 prisoners, cleared the ridge leading to his company's objective, and drove a deep wedge into the enemy line, making it possible for his battalion to occupy important, commanding ground. *{General Orders No. 97, War Department, 1 November 1945.}*

Staff Sergeant George D. Keathley (Army serial No. 38,105,361), Company B, 338th Infantry Regiment, 85th Infantry Division. For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action on 14 September 1944 on the western ridge of Mt. Altuzzo, Italy. After bitter fighting, his company had advanced to within 50 yards of their objective where it was held up because of intense enemy sniper, automatic small-arms, and mortar fire. The enemy launched three desperate counterattacks in an effort to regain their former positions, but all three were repulsed with heavy casualties on both sides. All officers and noncommissioned officers of the 2d and 3d Platoons of Company B had become casualties and *Sergeant Keathley,* guide of the 1st Platoon, moved up and assumed command of both the 2d and 3d Platoons, reduced to 20 men. The remnants of the two platoons were dangerously low on ammunition, whereupon *Sergeant Keathley,* under intense enemy sniper and mortar fire, crawled from one casualty to another, collecting their ammunition and administering first aid. He then visited each man of his two platoons, issuing the precious ammunition he had collected from the dead and wounded and giving them words of encouragement. The enemy now delivered their fourth counterattack which was approximately two companies in strength. In a furious charge they attacked from

the front and both flanks, throwing hand grenades, firing automatic weapons, and assisted by a terrific mortar barrage. So strong was the enemy counterattack that the company was given up for lost. The remnants of the 2d and 3d Platoons of Company B were now looking to *Sergeant Keathley* for leadership. He shouted his orders precisely and with determination, and the men responded with all that was within them. Time after time the enemy tried to drive a wedge into *Sergeant Keathley's* position and each time they were beaten back, suffering huge casualties. Suddenly an enemy hand grenade hit and exploded near *Sergeant Keathley,* inflicting a mortal wound in his left side. Hurling defiance at the enemy, however, he rose to his feet. Taking his left hand away from his wound and using it to steady his rifle, he fired and killed an attacking enemy soldier and continued shouting orders to his men. His heroic and intrepid action so inspired his men that they fought with incomparable determination and viciousness. For 15 minutes *Sergeant Keathley* continued leading his men and effectively firing his rifle. He could have sought a sheltered spot and perhaps saved his life, but instead he elected to set an example for his men and make every possible effort to hold his position. Finally, with the help of friendly artillery fire, the enemy withdrew, leaving behind many of their number either dead or seriously wounded. *Sergeant Keathley* died a few moments later. Had it not been for his indomitable courage and incomparable heroism, the remnants of the three rifle platoons of Company B might well have been annihilated by the overwhelming enemy attacking force. His actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service. *{General Orders No. 20, War Department, 29 March 1945.}*

First Lieutenant Robert T. Waugh, O-1302070, 339th Infantry, United States Army. For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy from 11 to 14 May 1944 at Tremensuoli, Italy. In the course of an attack upon an enemy-held hill on 11 May *Lieutenant Waugh* personally reconnoitered a heavily mined area before entering it with his platoon. Directing his men to deliver fire on six bunkers guarding this hill, *Lieutenant Waugh* advanced alone against them, reached the first bunker, threw phosphorus grenades into it and, as the defenders emerged, killed them with a burst from his tommy gun. He repeated this process on the five remaining bunkers killing or capturing the occupants. On the morning of 14 May *Lieutenant Waugh* ordered his platoon to lay a base of fire on two enemy pill boxes located on a knoll which commanded the only trail up the hill. He then ran to the first pill box, threw several grenades into it, drove the defenders into the open, and killed them. The second pill box was taken next by this intrepid officer through similar methods. The fearless actions of *Lieutenant Waugh* broke the Gustav Line at that point, neutralized six bunkers and two pill boxes, and he was personally responsible for the death of 30 of the enemy and the capture of 25 others. He was later killed in action at Itri, Italy, while leading his platoon in an attack. *{General Orders No. 79, War Department, 4 October 1944.}*

First Lieutenant Orville E. Bloch, O-1297830, Company E, 338th Infantry, United States Army. For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 22 September 1944 near Firenzuola, Italy. *Lieutenant Bloch* undertook the task of wiping out five enemy machine-gun nests that had held up the advance in that particular sector for one day. Gathering

three volunteers from his platoon, the patrol snaked their way to a big rock, behind which a group of three buildings and five machine-gun nests were located. Leaving the three men behind the rock, *Lieutenant Bloch* attacked the first machine-gun nest alone, charging into furious automatic fire, kicking over the machine gun, and capturing the machine-gun crew of five. Pulling the pin from a grenade, he held it ready in his hand and dashed into the face of withering automatic fire toward this second enemy machine-gun next located at the corner of an adjacent building 15 yards distant. When within 20 feet of the machine gun he hurled the grenade, wounding the machine gunner, the other two members of the crew fleeing into a door of the house. Calling one of his volunteer group to accompany him, they advanced to the opposite end of the house, there contacting a machine-gun crew of five running toward this house. *Lieutenant Bloch* and his man opened fire on the enemy crew, forcing them to abandon this machine gun and ammunition and flee into the same house. Without a moment's hesitation *Lieutenant Bloch,* unassisted, rushed through the door into a hail of small-arms fire, firing his carbine from the hip, and captured the seven occupants, wounding three of them. *Lieutenant Bloch* with his man then proceeded to a third house where they discovered an abandoned enemy machine gun and detected another enemy machine-gun nest at the next corner of the building. The crew of six spotted *Lieutenant Bloch* the instant he saw them. Without a moment's hesitation he dashed toward them. The enemy fired pistols wildly in his direction and vanished through a door of the house, *Lieutenant Bloch* following them through the door, firing his carbine from the hip, wounding two of the enemy and capturing six. Altogether *Lieutenant Bloch* had single-handedly captured 19 prisoners, wounding 6 of them, and eliminating a total of five enemy machine-gun nests. His gallant and heroic action saved his company many casualties and permitted them to continue the attack with new inspiration and vigor. *(General Orders No. 9, War Department, 10 February 1945.)*

Appendix 2: *Distinguished Unit Citations*

Company C, 337th Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action from 12 to 16 May 1944, near Tremensuoli, Italy. *Company C* participated in a battalion attack on a strategically important hill which was a corps objective. Prior to this attack another battalion attempted to take the objective, but suffered heavy casualties and was unable to hold the hill. Advancing through intense and concentrated artillery and mortar fire which halted two companies of the battalion, *Company C* relentlessly pressed forward and two platoons succeeded in reaching the crest of a hill in the route of advance toward the objective. Enemy artillery and mortar fire became more deadly and, in addition, small arms fire was brought to bear on these two platoons. With the left flank of the company unsupported it was necessary to spread out the few available men in order to continue the forward push. Reaching the crest after suffering heavy casualties *Company C* was subjected to fierce enemy counterattacks. Surrounded on three sides, the company received heavy and continuous machine gun and small arms fire from strong enemy forces. With only 18 men and remnants of two other companies and with no heavy weapons support, the courageous infantrymen of *Company C* held their positions against determined enemy attempts to recapture the hill. On the night of 13 May, relief arrived in the form of replacements, and a final enemy assault was repulsed successfully. Pressure was relieved by units attacking on both flanks of the hill position, and *Company C* was able to give supporting fire to both attacking elements. The indomitable fighting spirit and fortitude of the infantrymen of *Company C* reflect the finest traditions of the Army of the United States. *(General Orders No. 81, War Department, 14 October 1944.)*

Company G, 339th Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action from 11 to 14 May 1944 near Tremensuoli, Italy. *Company G* was assigned the mission of wresting from a determined enemy a hill which was the key terrain feature of the left flank of the German Gustav Line. Taking advantage of the preparatory artillery barrage, the company moved into the attack and seized a large portion of the objective before the barrage ceased falling. The two assault platoons, closing rapidly with the enemy before he could recover, killed 60 and captured 40 of the defenders, demolished 8 bunkers, reduced 7 pill boxes and captured 25 automatic weapons. The objective taken, *Company G* immediately emplaced and employed captured enemy weapons to assist the assaults of adjacent companies on two nearby hills and an intermediate ridge. After the enemy recovered from his initial confusion, *Company G* positions were pounded incessantly for 48 hours by artillery and mortar fire and were subjected to three determined counterattacks. The company suffered heavy casualties, and because of its isolated positions went without food and water for over 36 hours. With heroic determination the infantryman of this company held every inch of the ground gained. The fighting aggressiveness, courage, and devotion to duty displayed by members of *Company G* are worthy of emulation and reflect honor upon the armed forces of the United States. *(General Orders No. 81, War Department, 14 October 1944.)*

Company F, 337th Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action from 23 to 29 September 1944 near Roco, Italy. For 6 days

Company F held dominating Mt. Monzano in the face of repeated German attempts to regain the strategically important terrain feature. Occupying positions with little cover, as foxholes could not be dug in the solid rock, the infantrymen of this company were pounded mercilessly by enemy mortar fire and subjected to constant sniper and machine gun fire from the front and both flanks. Personnel of the company suffered bitterly from exposure to extreme cold and dampness, and frequent fogs enshrouded the mountain peak, providing the enemy with concealment for his attacks, infiltration tactics, and close-in harassing fire with automatic weapons. Supplies were hand-carried up a sheer, muddy slope swept by enemy fire, and casualties were evacuated over the same difficult and precipitous route. Despite all obstacles, the courageous infantrymen of *Company F* repelled four strong counterattacks and clung tenaciously to their precarious position, fighting grimly with rifles, bazookas, and grenades, pushing the enemy from the hill and inflicting heavy losses. Finally, after friendly forces on both flanks had advanced, *Company F* moved forward in the attack. The fortitude and invincible fighting spirit exhibited by officers and men of *Company F, 337th Infantry Regiment,* are magnificent tributes to the Infantry of the United States. *(General Orders No. 10, War Department, 22 February 1945.)*

The *338th Infantry Regiment, 85th Infantry Division,* is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy from 13 to 18 September 1944 in overcoming the German defenses on Mount Altuzzo, the key point of the Gothic Line in the division sector. Spearheading the penetration of this formidable barrier, the *338th Infantry Regiment* waged a bitter hill-to-hill struggle against an enemy stubbornly defending and counterattacking again and again. This hard-fought, grim, and bloody operation, culminating in capture of Mount Altuzzo, and the stern determination of the *338th Infantry Regiment* to hold this objective against powerful and fanatical counterattacks were outstanding contributions to the break-through of the Gothic Line, setting the stage for the final defeat of the Axis forces in Italy. By its actions in gaining its vital objective against the bitterly resisting enemy, the *338th Infantry Regiment, 85th Infantry Division,* displayed heroism, determination, and teamwork in keeping with the highest traditions of the Army of the United States. (This citation supersedes the citation of *Company B, 338th Infantry,* as published in General Orders 24, Headquarters Fifth Army, 7 March 1945, as approved by the Commanding General, Mediterranean Theater of Operations. Par. 3, sec. IX, WD General Orders 26, 1945, pertaining to the citation of *Company B, 338th Infantry,* and par. 15, WD General Orders 68, 1945, pertaining to the citation of *Company C, 338th Infantry Regiment,* are rescinded.) *(General Orders No. 9, Department of the Army, 21 October 1947.)*

A NOTE ON THIS BOOK

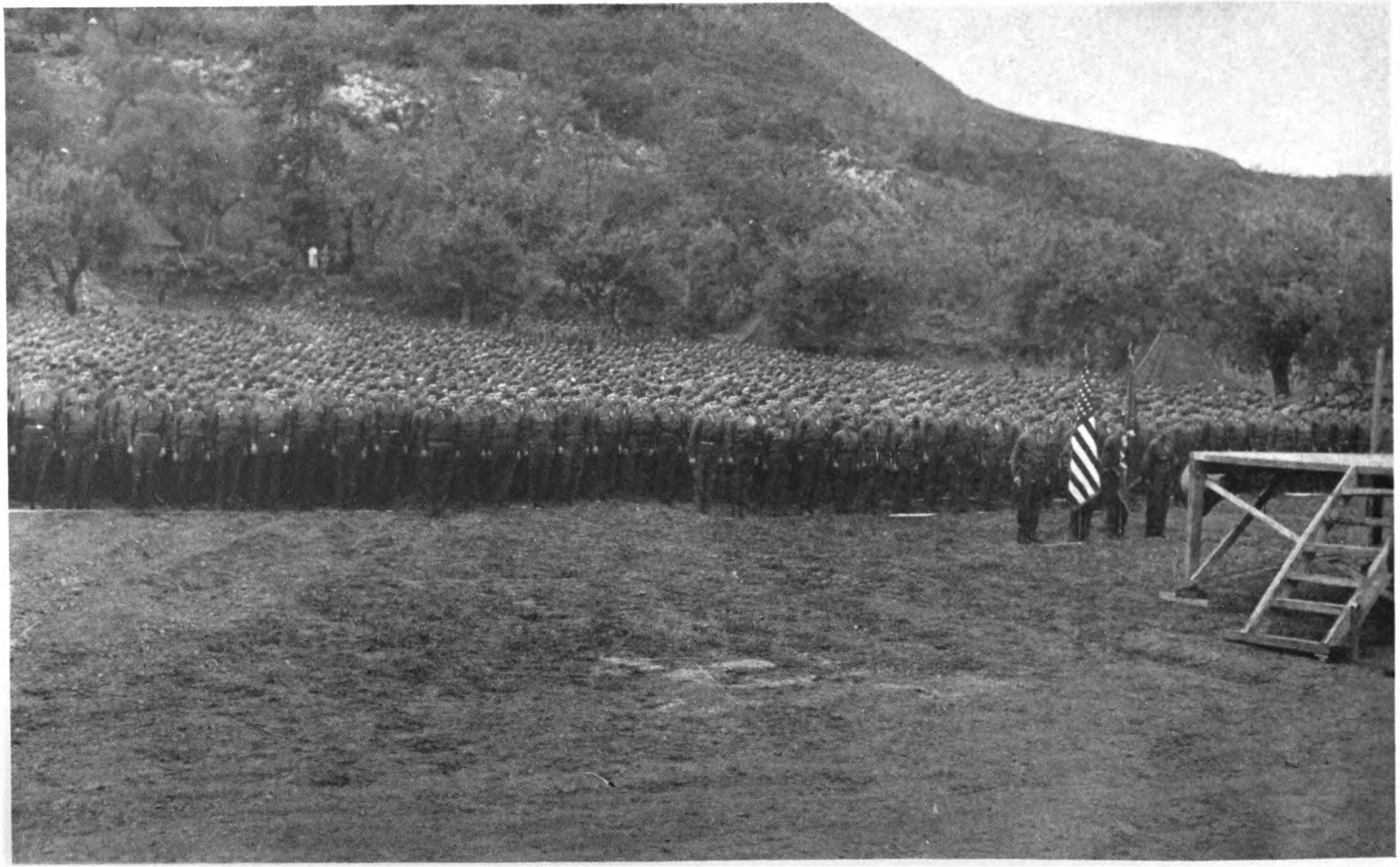
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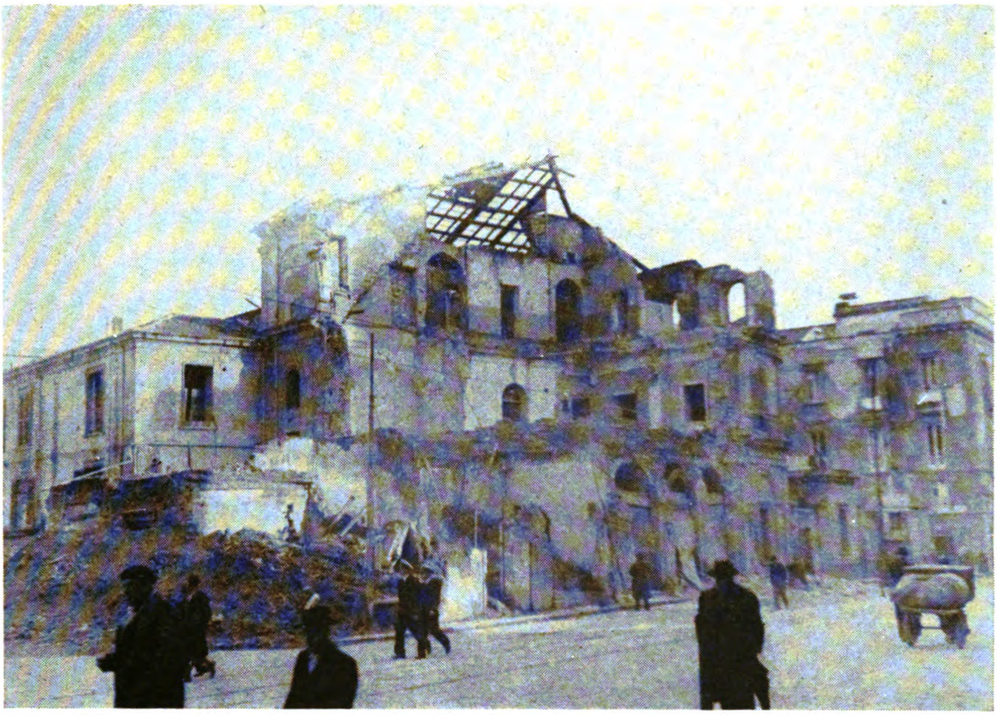
PHOTOGRAPHS



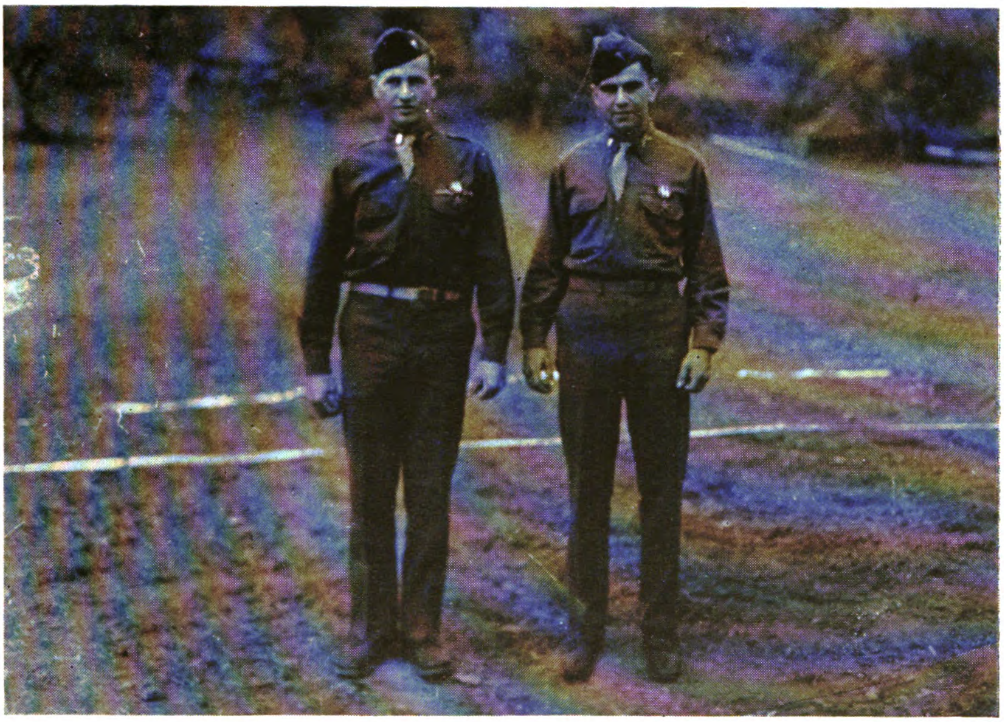
Major General John B. Coulter, Commanding General, 85th Infantry Division



Troops of the 339th Infantry mass to hear an address by General Mark W. Clark, Fifth Army commander, prior to the attack on the Gustav Line.



Destruction on a waterfront street in Naples.



Lieutenants Walter G. Moss and Jerome O. Gundrum, just after receiving the Silver Star for action in the Minturno sector of the Gustav Line.



Typical infantryman of the 85th Division equipped for patrol action.



General Coulter decorates Custermen for heroism in action.



Men of Company A, 339th Infantry, move through Scauri to wipe out snipers.



Troops of the 339th Infantry move up to Itri from Formia.



The 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, prepares for an amphibious move at Gaeta.



Custermen enter battered Itri square.



Marching through the ancient wall of Rome. Troops of the 85th Division march through Porta Maggiore as they occupy the city.



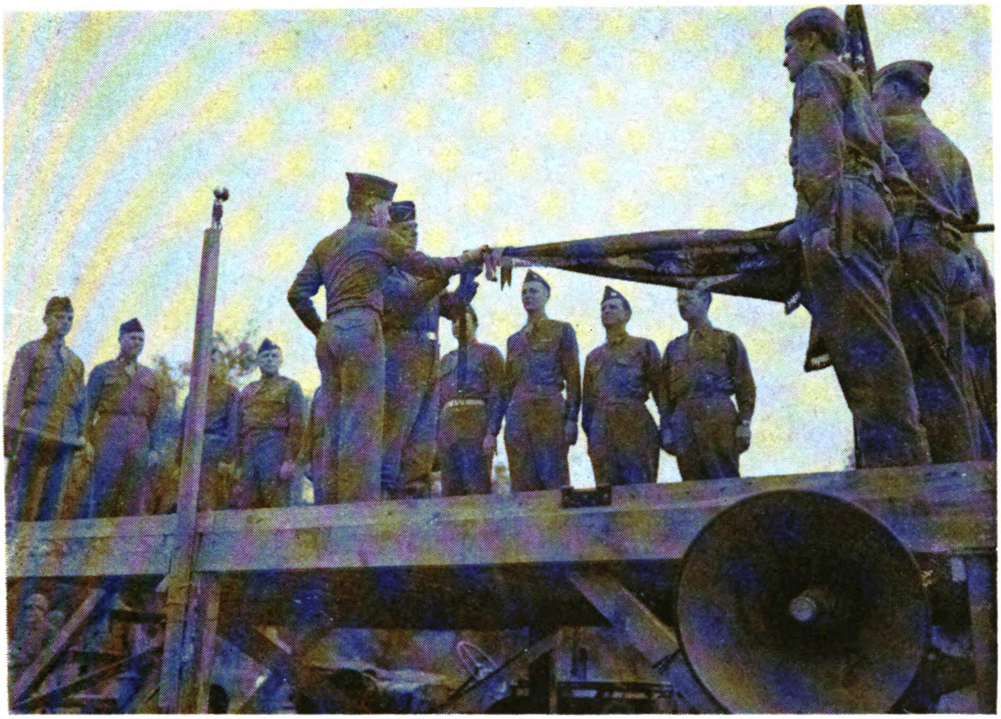
Francis Cardinal (then Archbishop) Spellman of New York, Military Vicar of the U.S. Armed Forces, blesses the 85th Division after Mass at Rosignano.



Major General Geoffrey Keyes, CG, II Corps, Major General John B. Coulter, CG, 85th Division, and Colonel Patrick J. Ryan, Chief Chaplain of Fifth Army, kneel in prayer at Rosignano.



Lieutenant T. L. Collins explains the construction and uses of the 7.2 rocket to Colonel William T. Fitts, Jr., Chief of Staff, 85th Division, Major General Geoffrey Keyes, CG, II Corps, and Major O. M. Woodbury, 752d Tank Battalion, before a demonstration firing on the battalion's range.



Captain Clayton Little, the 339th's adjutant, helps General Coulter attach the second battle streamer to the regiment's colors following the historic Rome–Arno offensive. Second from the left is Lt.Col. John T. English, Regimental Executive, and at his left is Colonel Brookner W. Brady, Regimental Commander. The Polar Bear regiment's first streamer was won in the North Russia Campaign in World War I.



Pfc. Clifton C. Rhodes, left, and Lieutenant Edwin O. Guthman, both members of the 339th Infantry, look over German matériel captured in a dugout in Grezzano. This position was a German bastion on Hill 732 in the Gothic Line.



Troops of the 85th Division march toward a newly won position in the Gothic Line near Firenzuola.



Troops of the 3d Battalion, 339th Infantry, advance over Mt. Verruca, over a trail on which men and supplies move to the front. The rugged terrain in the background is the first line of the Gothic defenses.



General Clark and General Coulter (in rear) and General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, Commander in Chief, Allied Armies in Italy, prepare to leave the CP of the 85th Division for a trip to the top of Mt. Altuzzo in the Apennines on a brief reconnaissance of the area.



An American Red Cross mobile coffee and doughnut unit near the Fifth Army front. The former Rose Marie DeCotis, (left), pride of the 85th Division, and Shirley Cobb, daughter of Ty Cobb, pose with combat men of the 85th Division in the mud and slush, in the Liverangano area.



This demolished house atop Mt. Altuzzo is being taken over by soldiers of Fifth Army who are using it as a collection point for wounded, as well as a signal center. This mountain feature was taken by the 85th Division after fierce fighting.



Members of Company B, 310th Engineers, work on a trail which was ruined by rain and melting snow, while an Indian convoy passes by.



(Photo by Michael Higgins)

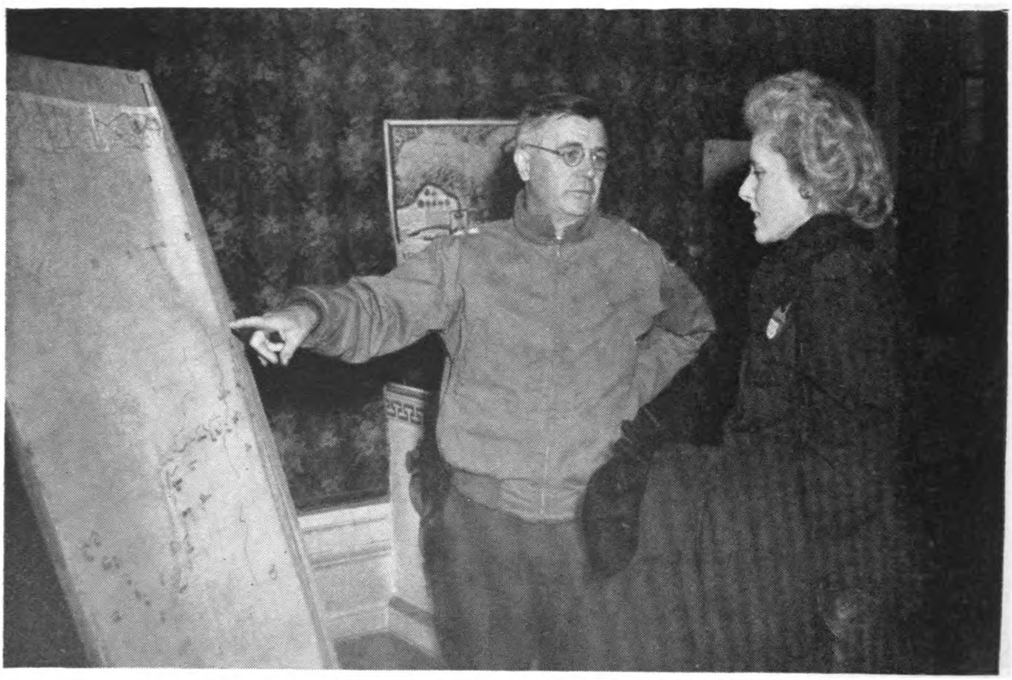
Company A, 337th Infantry, in the Gothic Line (east of Firenzuola). The Santerno River can be seen at the foot of the mountain.



Chemical fog conceals movements of infantrymen of Company B, 339th Infantry, as they advance to relieve another company in the Clemente area.



General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, on a visit to Italy congratulates General Coulter for victories won by the Custer Division in Italy. At left is Brigadier General Lee S. Gerow, Assistant Division Commander. General Clark is in the background. At right is Major General William G. Livesay, CG, 91st Division.



General Coulter explains his Division's situation to Representative Clare Booth Luce during her tour of the Fifth Army front.



Men of the 337th Infantrv leave the town of Piancaldoli on their way to the front a few miles distant.



At the base of a mountain trail in the South Clemente area Indian troops and men of the 337th Infantry check their supplies on mules before making the long steep climb to the front lines.



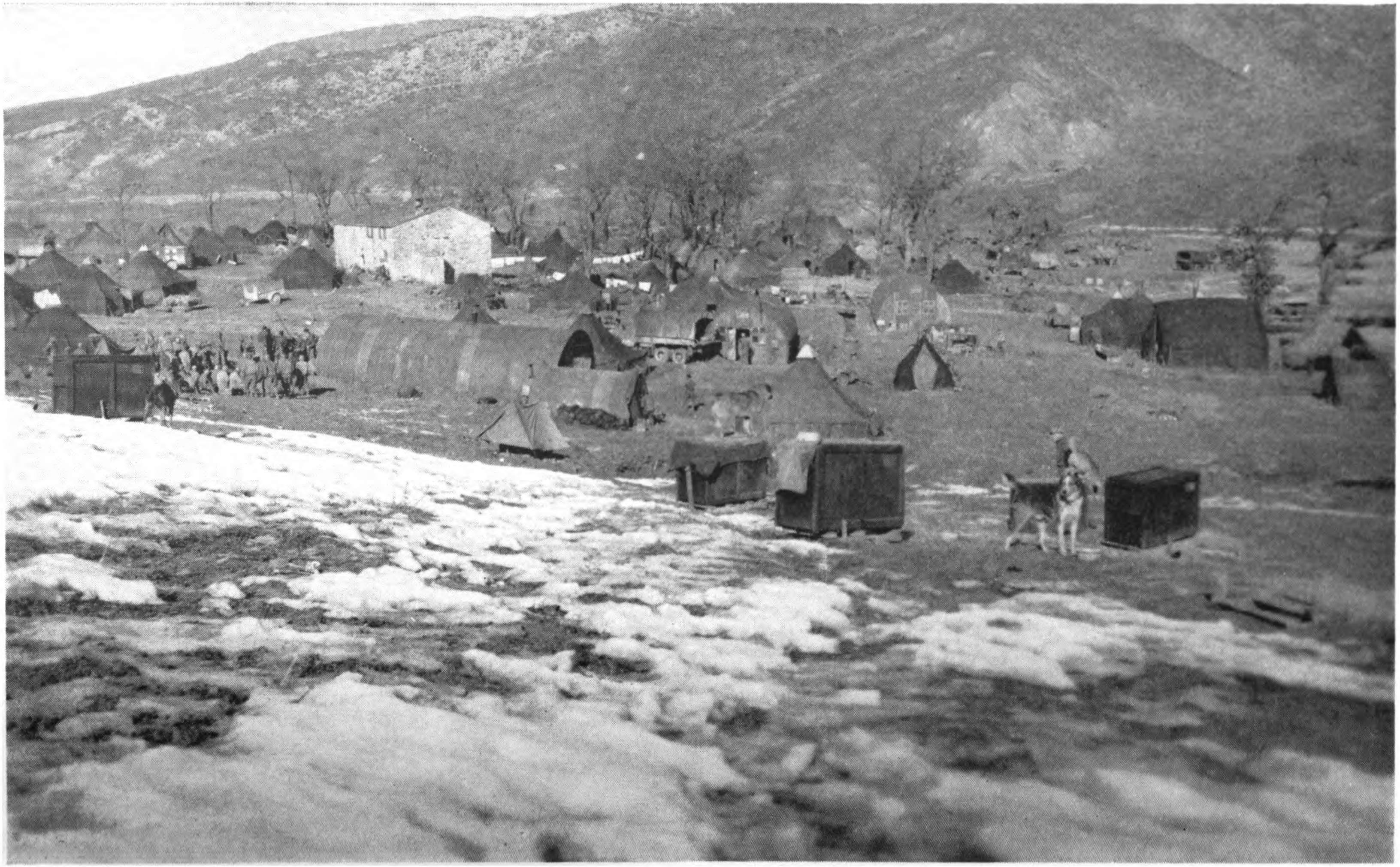
Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott, CG, Fifth Army, congratulates Lieutenant Orville E. Bloch after awarding him the Medal of Honor. Lieutenant Bloch is the only living member of the 85th Division to hold the Medal of Honor.



Men from Battery A, 328th FA Battalion, fire 105mm howitzers at German positions in the Apennine Mountains in the Ramagnola area.



Litter bearers of the 1st Battalion's medical section, 337th Infantry, carry a wounded soldier over a mountain mule trail.



Part of the 85th Division encampment in the valley of the North Apennines, during the winter of 1945. Note the messenger and patrol dogs of the war-dog platoon in the foreground.



An Indian mule skinner leads pack animals over a makeshift log trail through a sea of slick mud. In the background, men of the 310th Engineer Battalion maintain the trail during the winter fighting in the North Apennines.



Men of the 2d Battalion's Antitank Platoon, 337th Infantry, attempt to flush a German sniper in the Po Valley in the Riale area.

